

**Brand tribalism and the gamer: An examination of extreme
brand enthusiasts within video game platform brand
communities**

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Cameron Scotland Vivian Bishop

Department of Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurship
UC Business School
University of Canterbury
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Abstract

Brand tribalism is investigated in the context of video game platform brands, in order to both generate an understanding of video game platform brand tribes, as well as develop the literature on brand tribes as a whole. Significant work on brand community and brand tribalism by authors such as Muniz and O'guinn (2001), and Taute and Sierra (2014), is explored further, utilising an exploratory, qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with self-professed members of video game platform brand tribes, and thematic analysis was employed to produce findings not before uncovered in this area. This includes the possible relationship between individual maturity and brand tribe membership. Anecdotally, it would appear that individuals that are part of a brand tribe, at least in the present context of video game platform brands, grew out of their tribalism with time as they became older and more mature. The result of this is an individual who retains some key traits expected of brand tribe membership, whilst having other brand tribe specific traits diminish. This key finding, amongst a host of other themes, emerged as being prevalent and relevant to brand tribes in the context of video game platform brands. Accordingly, areas requiring further research are discussed, and an outline of this concludes the chapters.

Keywords: brand tribe, brand community, video games, identity, maturity

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

The video game industry has undergone a major transformation over the past 45 years of its existence since the revolutionary Pong was released in 1972 (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith, & Tosca, 2009). Over this time, it has blossomed from a niche industry confined to arcades into a multi-billion-dollar industry with \$21.5 billion being spent by video game consumers in 2015 alone (Entertainment Software Association, 2016), on both physical and digital products which can be found within most homes (ESA, 2016). It has also seen a large change in consumer demographic over that time. An industry once thought to be the exclusive domain of nerdy young men and boys has seen its audience greatly diversify with regard to both age and gender, with research showing an almost 60/40 split in the gender of video game consumers (ESA, 2016) and the average age of a gamer being 35 years old (Entertainment Software Association, 2017). Over the course of the industry's growth the competing main brands of products; most notably the Personal Computer (PC), Sony's PlayStation, Microsoft's Xbox, and Nintendo's assorted consoles, have established themselves in the market, and each 'brand' carries with them a significant community of consumers (Microsoft, 2014; Nintendo, 2016; Sony, 2017). It is worth noting that although 'PC' isn't a specific brand per se, the PC platform is treated as such by consumers, and is therefore included in this discussion.

Although it can be recognised that the video games industry is in a stage of steady growth, efforts to understand the consumers of video game products have been lacking in certain areas. Research such as by Anderson (2004) and DeCamp (2015) has investigated the effects of video games on consumer aggression, Shaffer (2005) and Prensky (2006) explored the educational applications of video games, and Badrinarayanan et al. (2014), Apperley (2006), and Cova, Pace, and Park (2007) have examined how community functions both within and around video and traditional games. No research has yet to be done however on the so-called 'brand tribes' that surround video game platform brands, such as PC, PlayStation, Xbox, and Nintendo. These segments of consumers are easily identifiable when following the criteria established by authors such as Cova (2001) and Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) as pertaining to brand tribe membership, yet these groups have not been investigated in an academic fashion. This leaves a segment of fanatical consumers that grows larger by the year (ESA, 2017) that is yet to be properly examined and understood through qualitative research methods.

This thesis seeks to fill this observed gap in the knowledge, and is intended to provide a greater understanding of both video game and general brand tribes through utilisation of a qualitative research approach. Specifically, it is an in-depth investigation into why some video game consumers belong to video game platform brand tribes, what behaviour, wants, or needs lead them to participate in their respective brand tribe, how this affects their consumption behaviour as a result, and finally how marketing practitioners can both promote video game platform brand tribe membership and best utilise this consumer segment through their marketing efforts.

1.2 Background to Research

The researcher's interest in this area of investigation stems from their own love of video games, and their involvement in video game communities and subcultures that has allowed them to experience video game culture first hand. From this position they observed the extent to which hardcore enthusiasts of video game platform brands make up the video game consumer market, and their often zealous behaviour and opinions towards other video game platform consumers and brands. Investigation of consumer tribalism is important as brand tribes are a potent force in the market (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; D'Alessandro, 2001; Taute & Sierra, 2014), and is crucial for understanding these consumer segments and managing them (Goulding, Shankar, & Canniford, 2013; Taute & Sierra, 2014). Whilst research has been undertaken with regard to video game community within video games (Badrinarayanan, Sierra, & Taute, 2014), brand tribalism surrounding video game platform brands, whilst apparent, is yet to be explored.

Brand tribalism was first described by authors such as Cova and Cova (2001) and D'Alessandro (2001) who noted certain consumer brand communities expressed tribal-based views of brand, and is an extension on the foundational work on brand community put forth by authors such as Cova (1997), Bender (1978), and Muniz and O'guinn (2001). Simply put, the research into brand tribalism examines the more extreme individuals that comprise brand communities, and the separate and different tribe to that of the greater brand community that they comprise. Brand tribes are defined as being where consumers are linked around a shared belief surrounding a brand, and is a deeper form of brand community wherein members express a much higher level of involvement and loyalty with and to the brand transcending basic consumption and entering into their individual identity (D'Alessandro, 2001; Dixon, 2005). The tribe is itself a society, and the bonds felt between both two tribe members and

between tribe members and the brand is much stronger than those bonds that exist within a brand community (Cova & Pace, 2007; Taute & Sierra, 2014).

In essence, brand tribes take the key factors of brand community, such as interpersonal bond, consciousness of kind, brand loyalty, and oppositional brand loyalty (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001), and amplify them. One clear case of this is with oppositional brand loyalty. Where general brand community members might carry an opposition to opposing brands in the casual sense that simply helps to separate who's in or out of the community, brand tribe members carry the notion of their brand's superiority over opposing brands to such a degree that they will make the effort to not only publicly denounce those brands but often also carry a negative opinion towards those individuals who consume those brands (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). In these ways brand tribes are clearly distinct from their more general brand community counterparts. The term 'brand tribe' comes from the traditional meaning of tribe, that being a small, strongly bonded community that is geographically-based and whose members hold firm loyalty to the tribe (James, 2006; Corry, 2011), although this sharing of the name tribe is largely in reference to structural similarities (such as strong bonds) shared between the two and is otherwise metaphorical (Finsterwalder, Love, & Tombs, 2014).

Recent studies have examined the utility that possessing a brand tribe may hold for a brand, and how brands should attempt to attract membership to their respective brand's tribe or foster the creation of one should one not already exist (Goulding et al., 2013; Taute & Sierra, 2014). Brand tribe members' increased levels of brand loyalty and involvement (D'Alessandro, 2001) means they are an audience that will readily accept most brand value offerings, and thus are a strong source of competitive advantage for a brand should they accrue a meaningfully-sized brand tribe. Brand tribe members have also been shown to be far more willing to take part in voluntary promotion of their given brand (The Economic Times, 2017), and as a result are a resource that marketers can utilise through savvy management in order to boost promotional reach. For this same reason marketers must also be vigilant in managing what their brand tribe's willingness to promote, as brand tribe members behaving antagonistically towards other brands and consumers could hurt brand equity by association.

Although brand tribes have been discussed generally to some degree by various authors (Cova & Cova, 2001; D'Alessandro, 2001; Muniz & O'guinn, 2001; Taute & Sierra, 2014), and even unintentionally examined in specific contexts without being defined as brand tribes (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Charmley, Garry, & Ballantine, 2012), still little has been done in the way of intentionally examining brand tribes in a specific context. Adding on top of this the exponential growth the video games industry is experiencing (ESA, 2017), and both the

researcher's and other individuals' (Poole, 2000; Harris, 2015; Orland, 2016) experiences observing the large numbers video game brand consumers who display the characteristics denoting belonging to a brand tribe, it makes sense both in academic and practical terms to target video game platform brand tribes as the focus of a qualitative investigation.

1.3 Description of the Research Process

As mentioned previously, a qualitative method of research was selected in order to best fulfil the intention of the research, as well as keep in line with the nature of previous studies on similar topics. Several research questions were developed in order to best guide research into this as yet unexplored context:

1. Why is a video game platform brand tribe member part of a respective platform's brand tribe? Is membership based on individual traits?
2. What general/social utility does a video game platform brand tribe hold for its members?
3. Does video game platform brand tribe membership affect a member's consumption behaviour? If so, how?

These research questions were developed with the intention being to best explore and understand the context being investigated, and result in accurate, rich, and valuable findings that a practicing marketer can effectively apply in the field of video game marketing.

Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with 14 members of video game platform brand communities, six from PC, five from PlayStation, two from Xbox, and one from Nintendo, in order to provide a diverse mix of respective brand tribes being represented in the research. After the interviews were completed, the transcriptions were analysed and common themes were grouped, compared, and contrasted. The findings of the research are presented in Chapter Four, and include new findings such as a potential link between an individual's maturity and brand tribe membership, where it was found that participants were more brand tribal in their younger years and have since 'grown out' of some traits considered to be core aspects of a brand tribe member.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The structure of this thesis is divided into chapters.

Chapter One has introduced the topic of brand tribalism and its relationship to video game platform brands, as well as acknowledged some of the key authors within this particular area of research and outlined the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two is a thorough review of the academic literature that pertains to the topic, encompassing the topics of brands, brand marketing and competition, brand communities and tribes, video games, 'gamers' and video game platforms, and finally what knowledge exists of video game brand tribes. Through the review of this literature a clear gap was identified with regard to brand tribalism surrounding video game platform brands, as has been previously mentioned. This has aided in the selection of the topic for this paper, as well as the method used to investigate.

Chapter Three details the methodology by which this topic has been investigated in the course of the thesis, as well as how it has been conducted to a high set of standards that are elaborated on.

Chapter Four discusses the findings from the conducted interviews in relation to the research questions, and themes are made apparent.

Finally, Chapter Five provides a discussion of these observed themes, how they can be related to the literature reviewed, and what new insights have been gained as a result. Finally, some recommended areas for future research are outlined, as well as limitations of this study discussed.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

2.1 Chapter Introduction

The video game industry's growth in popularity over the past 30 years has given rise to new avenues for marketers to apply their skills. This is equally true for those looking for insight into consumers and the video game market, with the formation of new consumer demographics and cultures available for investigation and understanding.

The video game market has proven itself to be a very diverse one, attracting consumers from all walks of life, genders, and age groups (ESA, 2017). The recreational nature of video games provides an attractive way to unwind following a busy day or simply get lost in when free time is available, all on the consumer's preferred platform(s). For a segment within the respective communities, however, support for their preferred platform transcends the casual, and enters a new realm of rabid brand loyalty (D'Alessandro, 2001). For these consumers, members of so-called 'brand tribes', support for their brand has become part of their identity as consumers and as individuals (D'Alessandro, 2001; Taute & Sierra, 2014). Little in the way of research has been conducted in the area of video game platform brand tribes, despite evidence of their existence in the market (Poole, 2000; D'Alessandro, 2001; Taute & Sierra, 2014; Orland, 2016).

This literature review seeks to gain a better understanding of these consumers termed 'brand tribal'. Due to the lack of existing literature with regard to brand tribalism in video game brand communities this literature review will instead draw on findings from related research. Firstly, brand will be defined as to what constitutes a brand and what purpose it serves in commerce, followed by discussion on how brands are marketed to consumers and how differing brands compete with each other within their respective marketplace. Following this, brand community is defined and discussed, along with a discussion as to what a tribe is with regard to community and how that translates into brand tribalism. Psychological ownership, and how it pertains to technology, will then be discussed. An overview of the literature surrounding video games is then produced, with focuses placed on the consumers of video games and the platform brands upon which they consume. The internet, and its relevance to the so-called 'cyberplace' and video games, will then be examined. Lastly, what is already understood regarding video game platform brand tribes and the associated 'Console Wars' will be discussed, as well as where the gap in the literature currently exists. The literature review finally concludes with a summary of the overall review content and video game platform brand tribes.

2.2 Brands

The first step to understanding brand tribes is understanding brands. Brands originated from 'brand' – a Dutch word meaning 'to burn' – and the act of burning a symbol into one's livestock in order to make them identifiable as belonging to a particular owner (Rijksmuseum, 2017). The term has since been extended into being used in the greater business world. A brand is now what differentiates an organisation or product in the eyes of the consumer (Fahy & Jobber, 2015). A brand consists of the names, terms, designs, and other features that separate an organisation and/or their product from the competition (American Marketing Association, 2017). They are important in the world of business and beyond in order for individual consumers to easily recall and identify an organisation or their products (Percy & Rossiter, 1992), and are a central part of an organisation's identity (Ghodeswar, 2008).

Although used in the identification of a particular organisation or their product, an organisation's brand now holds value in and of itself as measured by brand equity (Keller, 1993). As a result of a brand holding its own equity the brand may add significant value to a product by attaching itself to it, irrespective of the actual product's base value offering (Keller, 1993). A brand can be considered as a promise to customers of what they can expect from their products (Ghodeswar, 2008). Brands holding value consequently means that they may also hold and exert great power in the marketplace and beyond (Keller, 1993).

2.2.1 Brand Marketing

Although a brand holds value on its own, its equity is not useful unless adequately communicated to the consumer through effective brand marketing efforts (Shirazi, Lorestani, & Mazidi, 2013). This is the role of a brand's marketing team. A brand's value may be communicated via the methods of Integrated Marketing Communications (Pickton & Broderick, 2001), and through a variety of mediums such as television, print, radio, online, and so forth (Shimp & Andrews, 2007), in a manner that keeps the intended message consistent across all platforms (Duncan & Caywood, 1996). This use of a combination of channels, chosen in order to allow best reach to the target audience (William & Courtland, 1992), maximises the exposure of targeted consumers to the brand's message (Pitta, Weisgal, & Lynagh, 2006).

A brand's equity has significant applications for marketers, who can wield the brand's value and power in their marketing efforts (Bong Na, Marshall, & Lane Keller, 1999) in order to best increase and reinforce brand awareness and positively influence opinion of the brand amongst consumers (Percy & Rossiter, 1992). In his book *Strategic Brand Management*, Keller

(1998) produced a model called the Consumer-Based Brand Equity model. This model describes how consumer attitudes towards a brand have much power in influencing brand equity, as well as suggesting how they can be best managed. Ghodeswar (2008) similarly developed and proposed a model that seeks to aid marketing practitioners in the creation of brand equity dubbed the PCDL model; Positioning (the brand), Communicating (the brand message), Delivering (the brand performance), and Leveraging (brand equity). This is relevant for examining brand tribes in video games as from a marketing practitioner's perspective a brand tribe is both an asset and something to be carefully managed. The appropriate marketing theory and techniques, such as those mentioned above, must be employed in order to develop a brand tribe and avoid damaging the tribe or the brand.

2.2.2 Brand Competition

Through their respective brand marketing efforts, brands are able to compete with one another in the marketplace. Henry Ford was quoted in Forbes (1951) as saying "Competition is the keen cutting edge of business". Ever since the dawn of basic commerce and consumption, sellers have engaged in competition in order to gain the greatest share of buyers as possible. This job in modern times now falls to the marketer of a brand. The marketer must be well aware of both their own brand's presence in the market as well as that of their competition so that they may best position their own marketing efforts, see opportunity to target yet untapped markets and consumer segments, and effectively react to marketing efforts from their competitors (Maggard, 1976; Andrei, Ecaterina, & Ionut, 2010). Strong awareness of one's own brand's identity and position in the market will allow marketers to react accordingly and grow equity for their brand, preferably in a fashion that places themselves ahead of their competition (Ghodeswar, 2008). It is important to best maximise your own brand's equity in order to give your brand the competitive advantage (Barney, 1997).

A great example of brand competition is the so-called 'Cola Wars' fought largely in the 1980s between The Coca-Cola Company and PepsiCo (Bhasin, 2013), primarily the producers of Coca-Cola and Pepsi soft drinks, respectively. These two brand giants went against each other in a competition to out-perform their opponent in terms of increasing brand equity, going as far as to have their products launched into space as a promotion of their respective products (NASA, 1995). This competition between these two behemoth brands of the soft drink industry mirrors the current brand competition currently being waged by the leading video game console brands, notably; PlayStation, Xbox, and Nintendo (Poole, 2000; Harris, 2015; Orland, 2016). Similarly to Coca-Cola and Pepsi Co., the video game competition has too been termed as a 'war', or more specifically a 'Console War', by video game commentators such as Harris (2015) and Orland (2016). Whilst the PC platform is technically present in this so-called 'war', the discussion

regarding the Console Wars tends to focus on the platforms of PlayStation, Xbox, and Nintendo. This 'war' reflects the high level of competition present within the video game platform market, as well as the importance of the competition to the respective brands as a whole.

2.3 Brand Community

Along the course of the development of brands through brand marketing and competition between respective brands, groups of consumers can grow surrounding the brands. These are known as 'brand communities' (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). In their foundational work into the concept of brand community, Muniz & O'guinn (2001) described brand community as a specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations amongst admirers of a brand, and a concept until then not properly addressed in the field of consumer behaviour research. They noted that the concept of community has gone beyond that of 'place' as it was thought of in previous centuries (Tönnies, 2012), and instead taken a new meaning not bound to geography but to interpersonal bond (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). Where once community was restricted to the rural and geographically local, communities can now transcend the globe. Cova, Pace, and Park (2007) discuss this phenomenon in their study of the international Warhammer brand community, where it is observed that brand community transcends geographical restrictions whilst both integrating and ignoring differences in culture. This has been increasingly the case since the better advent of communication media; from phones, to television, and now the Internet (Berners-Lee, Dimitroyannis, Mallinckrodt, & McKay, 1994; Muniz & O'guinn, 2001; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The Internet has played perhaps the largest role in this transformation, as the World Wide Web and social media facilitates the establishment and growth of communities with consumers unbound by location or time (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The cornerstone of brand community, and community in general, is the 'consciousness of kind' (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). This homogeneity of mind, described by Bender (1978) as "we-ness", has members feeling an important bond to both the brand and each other, and is the basis of community. Members feel a connection to each other even though they may have never even been in the same country, let alone met in person. This is further echoed by Cova (1997, p. 307) in his assertion that "the link is more important than the thing", explaining that the brand merely facilitates the connection and is secondary to the bonds of those who make up the community.

Muniz & O'guinn (2001, p. 415) assert that whilst communities may form around any brand, they are mostly likely to do so around those with a "strong image, rich history, and threatening competition". Brand community is characterised by several factors, including: Legitimacy, oppositional brand loyalty, rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001).

Legitimacy is the process by which members of a community differentiate between true members of the community and those who are not (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). Being a proper member of the community marks an individual as being different or special within that brand community compared with being a consumer of other brands. The distinction of who is deemed to be a 'real' member of the community, and who is a fake, and the tension caused by this difference, is not unlike what one would see in a traditional community (Cornfield & Hodson, 1993). Consciousness of kind plays a large part in informing this view, as it again emphasises the like-mindedness of the members of the community focused in a shared direction. This is much like any community, however in the case of brand communities this shared consciousness is further informed by commercial and marketplace factors (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001) that steer this focus in a direction towards the focal brand.

Oppositional brand loyalty is a further example of consciousness of kind being perpetuated in the form of a shared opposition of members of the brand community towards opposition brands (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). An example of two oppositional brands would be Coca-Cola and Pepsi, as discussed in Section 2.2.2, or Apple Mac computers and PC. It is a part of brand community which further helps to separate who's in from who's out, and acts to bring deeper experience to the community and brand meaning. It is similar to how consumers use brand choice to help mark both their inclusion and exclusion from certain identities (Englis & Solomon, 1997). According to the tendency for communities to unite to oppose threats, real or perceived (Hunter & Suttles, 1972; Bensman & Vidich, 1995), similarly brand community members are united against oppositional brands. The bond between members is fortified through this shared opposition to other brands, and overall the overall community is strengthened as a result.

As with general communities, brand communities also develop their own set of rituals and traditions (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). Muniz and O'guinn (2001, p. 421) assert that "Rituals and traditions represent vital social processes by which the meaning of the community is reproduced and transmitted within and beyond the community". These usually centre on the shared consumption experiences brand community members have with the brand, and are a function to sustain the community's culture (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). These rituals and

traditions manifest themselves in many forms, including celebrating the history of the brand and sharing brand stories, amongst others (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). Being able to participate in these rituals and traditions acts as a form of cultural capital for members within the brand community (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998), displaying expertise, membership status, and commitment to the community, and as such carries importance to 'true' members of the community. Community members partaking in these activities also serves to reinforce consciousness of the brand between members, and contributes to the development of the community (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001).

Finally, communities share a moral responsibility to their brand. Muniz and O'guinn (2001, p. 424) said "It is the sense of duty to the community as a whole, and to individual members of the community". This sense of responsibility is what leads to collective action and group cohesion, and directs action towards two critical communal missions: Integrating and retaining members of the brand community, and assisting community members in the use of the brand (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001).

Brand communities are not to be confused with subculture, as subcultures tend to take the symbols of the surrounding majority culture and use them in opposition it (Hebdige, 1979). An example of this would be Black communities in the United States 'taking back' the 'N' word for themselves, in essence stripping it of the power and context which it once held and appropriating it for use within their own subculture. Brand communities instead embrace aspects of the surrounding culture's identity rather than rejecting or twisting into new meaning. There can however be some overlap between brand community and subculture, such as in the case of Harley Davidson. When authors Schouten and McAlexander (1995) examined the Harley Davidson brand community they found that the community members used their participation in the community as a way of escapism from the everyday monotony of their lives, allowing them a freedom from the normal rules that would otherwise dictate their actions. This could similarly be applied to the case of video game consumption, as video game consumers use video games to escape the rigid rules of society and act out fantasies that would be otherwise deemed taboo in the real world in an environment free from consequence (Murray, 1998).

2.3.1 Brand Tribalism

The brand tribe is a phenomenon distinct from that of a simple brand community, and it is important to distinguish between the two. Where a brand community is a community of consumers that has formed around the consumption of a brand (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001), a brand tribe is defined as being where consumers are linked around a shared belief surrounding a brand (Dixon, 2005), and is a deeper form of brand community wherein members express a

much higher level of involvement and loyalty with and to the brand transcending basic consumption and entering into their individual identity (D'Alessandro, 2001). The brand tribe is itself a society, a "parallel social universe with its own myths, values, rituals, vocabulary and hierarchy" (Cova & Pace, 2006, p. 1089). The bonds felt by members between both themselves and the brand, as well as with other members of the tribe, are of a much stronger degree than within a more general brand community (Taute & Sierra, 2014).

This definition is based off of the anthropological form of tribalism – small communities of often related individuals who "have followed ways of life for many generations that are largely self-sufficient, and are clearly different from the mainstream and dominant society" (Corry, 2011). Tribes can include familial societal groups such as clans or kinships. These tribes that have existed in the past, and those that still exist today, are small societies unto themselves organised on the basis of social and familial groups (James, 2006). A traditional tribe is a physical, face-to-face community, bound together by family relations, reciprocal exchange, and strong ties to place (James, 2006). The term tribe carries a connotation of a more technologically and socially/culturally underdeveloped, as well as basic, grouping of individuals, and so it is perceived by some to be a negative piece of terminology (Pambazuka, 2008; Africa Action, 2012). Traditional tribalism and brand tribalism differ in that unlike traditional tribes, brand tribes are "inherently fragile, ephemeral and fluid forms of connectedness" (Finsterwalder et al., 2014, p. 197). Due to the major differences between what makes a traditional tribe versus what makes a brand tribe there is little that can be drawn from the existing knowledge of traditional tribes in attempting to explain brand tribes aside from some structural similarities, and that the term 'tribe' in the context of brand tribes is largely metaphorical (Finsterwalder et al., 2014).

D'Alessandro (2001, p. 22) describes brand tribes as not being based around geography or bloodline as tribes are defined in the conventional anthropological sense, but rather "determined largely by education and accomplishment, and they are manifested by the things we consume". Cova and Cova (2001) add that the term 'tribe' reflects the individual's return to pre-industrial values such as religiosity, a local sense of community, a fusion of value systems, and a shared ethnocentrism. The key element of brand tribes is that they are formed by consumers organically and voluntarily through their respective individual identification with the brand (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009), resulting in a concentrated grouping of consumers with a high level of brand involvement towards their favoured brand that place the brand as being a part of their identity as consumers and individuals (D'Alessandro, 2001). Another term often used to describe members of brand tribes is as 'fanboys', popularly used colloquially (Locke, 2012). A fanboy, a term which does not necessarily reflect the actual gender of the

individual which it is labelling, is described as being rabid for their brand. This term is often used in a deprecative fashion by those criticising the involvement of those members (Locke, 2012).

Such involvement with the favoured brand carries with it a sense of deep connection as to the notion of truth or rightness, meaning brand tribe members, or 'brand tribalists', carry with them the inherent belief of the superiority of their chosen brand. This can lead to a variety of different behaviours such as public denouncement of opposition brands in an effort to promote their own, and viewing an individual's ownership of a brand (theirs or an oppositional brand) as a describer of their character (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). As such brand tribes take antagonism of opposing brands to a higher level than the standard brand community.

Whilst Muniz and O'guinn's work (2001) laid a strong foundation for an understanding of brand community it did not go into detail on the existence of the brand tribe, aside from briefly alluding to an example of it provided by Schouten and McAlexander (1995). Schouten and McAlexander (1995) discuss an example of a brand tribe in their ethnography on members of the Harley Davidson brand community. They noted that their community functions on a more intense level to the traditional brand community, going so far as to have a 'religion-like' element to it with Harley Davidson being the idol that is revered and worshipped. Schouten and McAlexander were criticised by Holt (1997) for placing too much of an emphasis on self-transformation as an explanation for this formation of religion-like brand community, rather than the collective social factors that influence the development and behaviour of communities. Another study of a brand tribe that was not identified as such was in the case of Charmley et al.'s (2012) research into brand avoidance in consumer sub-cultures, wherein the authors studied the 'skater' sub-culture and their relationship with major skateboarding brands. The characteristics that some of the participants displayed fell comfortably into what existing literature would define as being brand tribal in nature, however no discussion was had regarding brand tribes in the research and the participants were not identified as belonging to such a brand tribe. These are but two instances of brand communities fitting the description of brand tribes being discussed but not identified as such, and certainly more will exist. This perhaps highlights the general lack of awareness towards brand tribes that currently exists within academia, and the need for further efforts to increase the knowledge on the topic.

Brand tribes have great application for use in marketing. Tribe members are not simply consumers of a product, but also willingly play a large role in its promotion (The Economic Times, 2017). Brand tribe members actively want to communicate the brand to other consumers, both internal and external to the existing brand community, and should be given the

means and direction to do so by marketers. Taute and Sierra (2014) assert that moving occasional brand consumers to brand tribe members should be one of the key objectives of the organisation, and Goulding et al. (2013) identify brand tribes as a strategic resource for brand managers; such is the asset that having a brand tribe surrounding your brand provides. The desire to foster brand tribalism highlights the need for strong community management practices to be applied by the marketer in order to succeed in not only developing any currently existing brand tribe, but also in making ordinary brand consumers aware of the tribe and attracting them into joining (Taute & Sierra, 2014). As for now however the discussion of brand tribes and their development and exploitation remains largely in the realm of academia rather than practice, which for many organisations is an opportunity for sustainable competitive advantage left unseized (Dixon, 2005; Taute & Sierra, 2014).

Some research has come out in opposition to the concept of brand tribes' existence being solely dependent on a brand. Researchers in a study on brand tribalism and social influences found that, in the case of self-expressive brands, their participants that made up the category of brand tribalists actually possessed a lesser degree of brand loyalty and offered less word-of-mouth than non-tribal participants (Ruane & Wallace, 2015). This study suggested that, at least in the case of self-expressive brands such as in fashion, tribal consumers may be purely loyal to their respective tribe rather than a brand, and that the brand is simply a focal point for the tribe to rally around for a period of time before moving on to another one (Ruane & Wallace, 2015). This runs in opposition to previous literature that claims higher levels of involvement and brand loyalty to the focal brand, such as D'Alessandro (2001) and Taute and Sierra (2014), and suggests that brand tribes are in some instances more about the social utilities they provide rather than the consumption aspect that is partaken in by tribal consumers (Cova and Shankar, 2012). This aligns with Cova (1997) who stated that the brand is secondary to the bonds of the community, rather than the main item of importance. Goulding et al. (2013) describe this through their concept of 'collective social action', where consumers' identifying with each other in the tribe is merely facilitated by a focal brand rather than the brand being the main purpose, which would appear to be the case in the Ruane and Wallace (2015) study.

Unlike brand community, brand tribalism is a field of theory much less researched as of yet. Authors such as Muniz and O'guinn (2001) laid the foundation of this field with their study and understanding of brand community, but did not define nor differentiate whether the communities they studied could be considered brand tribes. Factors that define a brand community that they described, particularly regarding opposition to opposing brands, may not in fact be a factor of all brand communities but rather fundamental to brand tribes. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) and Charmley et al. (2012) conducted research into what we would

now call a brand tribe, but either were without yet having the existing literature to define it as such, or simply did not identify it as being a brand tribe, respectively. D'Alessandro (2001) discussed brand tribes in relation to creating value for the associated brand. Dixon (2009) discusses tribes with regard to the power and influence they can exert onto the marketplace, and indeed the greater environment. Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) examined brand tribes in the context of brand relationships and reputation, finding that brand tribes were a stronger predictor of brand relationship between consumer and brand than brand reputation is. Taute and Sierra (2014) examined the utility of brand tribes with regard to fostering brand relationships and their application for marketing practitioners. Ruane and Wallace (2015) put forth evidence that brand tribes may not be dependent on a particular brand, contrary to popular literature on the subject. A firm understanding and widespread evidence of brand tribe examples is however yet to be established in consumer behaviour theory, leaving a gap in the literature for further research into brand tribes in different specific contexts to fill. This is especially true in the subject area of video games, where no literature presently exists with regard to brand tribes in the video game platform context.

2.4 Psychological Ownership

As with in the case of brand tribalism, individuals can experience a sense of ownership over their chosen brand – regardless of whether they in fact have any actual legal ownership. This is referred to as ‘Psychological Ownership’. Psychological ownership is defined by Pierce, Rubinfeld, and Morgan (1991) as the state of mind in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership (material or immaterial in nature) or a piece of it is ‘theirs’ (i.e. “it is MINE!”). Van Dyne and Pierce (2004) describe it as the “psychologically-experienced phenomenon in which an (individual) develops possessive feelings towards a target” (p. 439). Older work on the phenomenon such as Isaacs (1933) explains that a feeling of psychological ownership in an individual emerges when “what is mine becomes (in my feelings) part of me”, though James (1890) is careful to note the fine line between what an individual experiences as “mine” and what an individual would call “me”. In this state one’s possessions are felt as extensions of the self (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992), and here the target becomes a part of the individual’s identity and the state of psychological ownership emerges. Belk (1988, p. 160) built on this further, stating that “we are what we have”, and that possessions are important to individual identity second only to mind and body, emphasising the importance of material ownership when discussing an identity. Psychological ownership is distinct in its conceptual

core, motivational bases, development, associated rights and responsibilities, and consequences (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001).

The reasons for the development of psychological ownership vary. Some scholars have suggested that it is driven by an innate need to possess (Weil, 1952; Porteous, 1976), whilst others argue that there is very little evidence suggesting an innate ownership instinct in individuals (Beaglehole, 1932). Human development scholars have suggested that ownership and its associated psychological state are learned in the early development process (Seligman, 1975). Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks (2003) propose three key motives wherein psychological ownership is rooted: *efficacy and effectance*, *self-identity*, and *having a place*. Efficacy and effectance constitutes an individual's need to exert control over a target, influencing and altering their environment (Furby, 1980). This satisfies the need for efficacy and creates a sense of satisfaction if desirable outcomes are acquired. Self-identity describes an individual's need to use physical and non-physical possessions as a conduit of self-expression (Dittmar, 1992). Individuals use possessions to define themselves, express their self-identity to others, and ensure continuity of their self across time. Having a place is characterised by the individual's desire to have a territory/space to dwell or call home (Porteous, 1976), as having a place is an important "need of the human soul" (Weil, 1952, p. 41).

Pierce et al. (2003) further offer three routes to building psychological ownership: *Controlling the target*, *coming to intimately know the target*, and *imparting the self into the target*, all of which revolve around the object's relationship with the individual's 'self'. For controlling the target, Rudmin and Berry (1987) found that ownership means the ability of an individual to use and control the use of objects. Further research has shown that control exercised over an object eventually gives rise to feelings of ownership toward that object (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Tuan, 1984). Objects that can be controlled come to be regarded as part of the self (McClelland, 1951), and the greater the degree of control the more an object is experienced as part of the self (Furby, 1978). Conversely, objects that cannot be controlled or that are controlled by others are not perceived to be part of the self (Seligman, 1975). For coming to intimately know that target, an individual's association with an object gives rise to feelings of ownership towards it (Beggan & Brown, 1994). Beaglehole (1932) argues that through intimate knowledge of an object, person, or place, a fusion of the self with the object takes place. An example of this would be with a gardener, who "after a certain time feels that the garden belongs to him" (Weil, 1952, p. 33). Through this, individuals come to feel that an object is theirs simply due to being familiar and associated with it. Through this association we come to intimately know an object, and the more knowledge an individual has about an object the deeper the relationship between the two, hence the stronger the feeling of

ownership (Beggan & Brown, 1994). For investing the self into the target, scholars such as Marx (1976) reason that through exertion of effort we impose part of ourselves into the things we create. As a result, these objects come to be representations of the self, much like our words, thoughts, and emotions (Pierce et al., 2003). In this way individuals own the objects they have created in the same way they own themselves (Pierce et al., 2001). Such investment of an individual's effort, time, energy, and attention into objects causes the self to become one with the object and to develop feelings of possession toward that object (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

Psychological ownership in an individual can lead to a range of both positive and negative outcomes. Potential positive outcomes include improved citizenship behaviour, discretionary effort, and personal sacrifice towards causes the individual feels ownership of (O'driscoll, Pierce, & Coghlan, 2006). Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson (1997) found that individuals with psychological ownership over their work experienced enhanced perceptions of responsibility and stewardship towards their organisational role. Pierce et al. (2001) noted that individuals who perceive themselves to have some ownership in their work experienced greater felt rights, responsibilities, and burden sharing within their respective organisations. Psychological ownership in this context is self-perpetuating too, as an individual's perceived right to participation in decision-making within an organisation is balanced by a felt responsibility to be informed, thus further developing the individual's psychological ownership of the organisation through coming to more intimately know the object. These principles can as easily be applied to community as organisation. Potential negative outcomes as a result of psychological ownership can manifest in the form of feelings of genuine personal loss (Baer & Brown, 2012), ignition of interpersonal conflict between individuals (Brown & Robinson, 2011), a general unwillingness to take advice and direction from even legitimate sources (Baer & Brown, 2012), and a resistance to change (Dirks, Cummings, & Pierce, 1996). Both categories of outcome, both positive and negative, are not a certainty however, and can be carefully managed to promote positive outcomes and suppress/prevent negative outcomes.

The effects of psychological ownership with regard to technology have too been explored. Scholars such as Barki, Paré, and Sicotte (2008) and Klesel, Ndicu, & Niehaves (2016) have investigated psychological ownership's interaction with information technology, referred to as POIT (Psychological Ownership of Information Technology). They investigated the phenomenon of POIT in organisational contexts and defined the role that POIT plays within the organisational structure as well as its potential applications, such as in BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) and CYOD (Choose Your Own Device) situations, putting forth a clearer vision as to how organisations may structure job roles to facilitate development of psychological ownership in

staff. Larivière, Bowen, Andreassen, Kunz, Sirianni, Voss, Wunderlich, and De Keyser(2017) touched upon the consequences of psychological ownership in their paper on the ‘Service Encounter 2.0’, wherein the authors discussed technology’s transformative effects on employee and customer job roles. They asserted that both customers and employees alike must adapt their roles in the service encounter in order to accommodate the new technologies increasingly involved in the encounter, and that role readiness is at least partly mediated by, as well as a builder of, psychological ownership. Jussila, Tarkiainen, Sarstedt, and Hair (2015) further expand upon this, discussing the importance of receptiveness, attractiveness, and manipulability of technology when encouraging psychological ownership of the technology by both customers and staff in an exchange encounter. These are but a few examples of research into the relationship psychological ownership has with technology, however as technology continues to evolve at a great pace, further opportunities for research emerge.

It is important to distinguish psychological ownership of an item from legal ownership of an item. Pierce et al. (2003) said that “Although possibly related, legal and psychological ownership differ in some significant ways. For example, legal ownership is recognized foremost by society, and hence the rights that come with ownership are specified and protected by the legal system. In contrast, psychological ownership is recognized foremost by the individual who holds this feeling. Consequently, it is the individual who manifests the felt rights associated with psychological ownership.” (p. 5-6). As a result, psychological ownership is a deeply personally experienced phenomenon when compared with the more society-held idea of legal ownership. To further differentiate the two phenomena, multiple scholars (Isaacs, 1933; Furby, 1980; Etzioni, 1991; Rousseau & Shperling, 2003) have noted that psychological ownership can exist in the absence of traditional legal ownership, such as in the case of an employee regarding their assigned desk as being ‘theirs’ despite company ownership of the particular piece of furniture.

2.5 Video Games

An example of brands and brand communities would be those within the video game industry, where prominent brands such as Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo all carry sizeable consumer followings (Microsoft, 2014; Nintendo, 2016; Sony, 2017). The video game industry has undergone a major transformation over the past 45 years of its existence since the revolutionary Pong was released in 1972 (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith, & Tosca, 2009). Over this time it has blossomed from a niche industry confined to arcades into a multi-billion dollar industry with \$30.4 billion being spent by video game consumers in 2016 alone (ESA, 2017), compared to the comparatively small \$6.9 billion spent in 2002 (Entertainment Software

Association, 2004). These video games come as both physical and digital products, and 67% of U.S. households are reported to own a dedicated video game platform (ESA, 2017).

Some existing theory aids with understanding video games as a medium for recreation and defines video games' value as an art form. This research comes in two major categories: narratology and ludology. Proponents for narratology such as Murray (1998) base the forefront of their theory in the idea of video games as a storytelling medium and a form of interactive fiction. They argue that video games present a medium to the consumer in which they are allowed to act out another person in an alternate, fictional world without real-world consequence, and allow them to become something they are not for a brief period of time. Conversely ludologists such as Aarseth (2004) argue that the video game is first and foremost a game, which must be understood in terms of its rules, interface, and the concept of play that it deploys. They argue that although video games often certainly contain traditional narratives, these aspects are incident to the core interaction and gameplay. As an example, Aarseth (2004) cites the character of Lara Croft from the popular video game series *Tomb Raider*, stating "the dimensions of Lara Croft's body, already analysed to death by film theorists, are irrelevant to me as a player, because a different-looking body would not make me play differently... When I play, I don't even see her body, but see through it and past it". Apperley (2006) sought a different methodology to these two main approaches, contesting that the genre of the video game is far more relevant when analysing – especially contrasting and comparing – video games' relationship with consumers rather than the approach to the narrative that an individual may take. His findings were that different genres appeal to different motivations that an individual may have for consuming video games, for example hyper-performativity from action games or the distance and thoughtfulness of a strategy game (Apperley, 2006).

Much research has also been done on the effects of consuming video games on consumers. Anderson (2004) studied the effects of violent video games on consumers, concluding that violent video games do not in fact cause consumers to be any more violent than they otherwise would be. This is further reinforced by more recent research such as by DeCamp (2015) who when allowing for factors such as natural violent tendency of participants and other social factors found violent video game consumption to not be a predictor of violent behaviour. Despite this video games still commonly carry a social stigma in both common and academic spheres that implies violent consumers (APA, 2015). Furthermore, video game consumers have long carried an image of being social outcasts – the nerdy and unkempt. This is especially true amongst those designated as fanboys, however this has since been found to be an inaccurate and unfair attribution, especially since video games have become far more mainstream

(Williams, Yee, & Caplan 2008; Locke, 2012). Despite this, a large degree of negative perception towards video game consumers still remains societally held (APA, 2015).

Video games have also been shown by many researchers to have considerable application in the field of education. Authors such as Squire (2003), Gee (2003), and Prensky (2006) have investigated the use of video games in education and found that video games are effective tools in understanding and developing learning and literacy in users. Boot, Kramer, Simons, Fabiani, and Gratton (2008) studied the effects of video game consumption on those that consumed 20+ hours of video games per week, finding that these consumers deemed 'expert gamers' by the authors had increased abilities of attention, memory, and control over mental functions. Overall it is likely that different elements of what makes up a video game will appeal to different video game consumers, and that video games have applications beyond that of simply consumption for recreational purposes.

2.5.1 'Gamers' (Video Game Consumers)

The video games industry has seen a large change in its consumer demographic, or 'gamers' as they are known colloquially, over the course of its lifetime. An industry once thought to be the exclusive domain of nerdy young men and boys has seen its audience greatly diversify with regard to both age and gender. Research shows that the gender demographic of video game consumers as of 2017 is an almost 60/40 split between males and females, with 59% reported to be male and 41% reported to be female (ESA, 2017). The average age of a gamer has similarly increased, from 29 years old in 2004 (ESA, 2004) to 35 years old as of 2017 (ESA, 2017). Research also shows that 91% of children between 2 and 17 years of age are playing video games (Coldewey, 2011).

Individual identity also plays a role in the demographics that make up video game consumers. Like with certain consumer communities in other markets, such as with Harley Davidson (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), some video game consumers like to incorporate their consumption into their personal identities. An example of this is with the 'Gaymer' community – a group of video game consumers who are tied together by the fact that they are homosexual, bisexual, or transsexual (Sliwinski, 2006).

Researchers have attempted to classify whether different gamers could be considered 'hardcore' or casual consumers of video games, proposing metrics for measuring their level of dedication (Ernest, 2002), measured emphasising action, competitiveness, complexity of the video games they consume, the gaming communities they are part of, and how in the knowledge they are of video game developments. These metrics were decried by some, however, for being too vague to be valuable in measurement or application (Tassi, 2013).

2.5.2 Video Game Platforms

The competing brands that dominate the video game industry, and the gamers that populate the communities surrounding these respective brands, have changed since its inception, with some emerging and some fading into history. In the early days of video games home platform brands such as Atari, Sega, and Nintendo were the main players competing in the market (Poole, 2000). Over the course of the video game industry's growth the competing main brands of products; most notably the PC, Sony's PlayStation, Microsoft's Xbox, and Nintendo's assorted platforms, have firmly established themselves as leaders in the present market, and each brand carries with them a significant community of consumers (Microsoft, 2014; Nintendo, 2016; Sony, 2017).

The communities that each of these brands possess very well exhibit the traits put forth by Muniz & O'guinn (2001) as being proper brand communities, such as being non-geographically bound, specialised, and based around the interpersonal bonds between members and the brand. These communities transcend border and culture, are unbound by time or place, and members share a consciousness-of-kind. They further seem to fit the criteria proposed by authors such as D'Alessandro (2001), Cova & Cova (2001), and Taute & Sierra (2014) such as high levels of involvement with the brand, extreme brand loyalty, religiosity of the group, and integration of the brand with personal identity, suggesting their existence as brand tribes.

2.6 The Internet

The communities that surround video games have undergone a transformation since the early days of the video game industry, beginning as small groups that met up in person to discuss their favourite games to a truly international community comprising thousands to millions of gamers. An, and perhaps *The*, advance in technology that has facilitated this rise of international video game communities is the internet. The internet has its origins in the 1960s, an attempt by the government of the United States of America to develop a robust and reliable method of communication via computer networks (Stewart, 2000). It was an incredible success, revolutionising the way communication could be conducted over space and time (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The internet has no centralised 'owner' as such, but rather each constituent network in the respective countries it operates sets the regulations for access and usage (Strickland, 2014). As such in certain countries the internet is subject to extensive censorship, largely for religious or control reasons, whilst in others it is free and open to everyone (Deibert, Palfrey, Rohozinski, Zittrain, & Haraszti, 2010). The internet is also often utilised for

surveillance purposes, whether by government or criminal organisations (Diffie & Landau, 2008). This involves monitoring users' internet data, which could then be acted on should the data warrant it. This has raised concerns regarding the security of the internet (Huang, Rau, & Salvendy, 2010; Goel, Williams, & Dincelli, 2017), especially with regards to the invasion of individuals' privacy by both private and government organisations (Fuchs, Boersma, Albrechtslund, & Sandoval, 2013), as well as cybercrime conducted by criminal elements (Wall, 2007).

The success achieved by this new form of communication paved the way for commercial networks and private enterprises to link in to the internet in the early 1990s, thus beginning the transition of the internet into what we know today (Peter, 2004). The creation of the World Wide Web in particular enabled this transition. This 'World Wide Web', as it is referred to, is the format of the internet made for the general individual rather than government application, and is what most internet users will interface with when interacting with the internet (Berners-Lee et al., 1994). This has had great impact on traditional media, which has been forced to adapt to the new environment created by the internet and capitalise on the incredible utility that the internet provides – lest it fade into irrelevancy (Mohammed, Fisher, Jaworski, & Paddison, 2003; Hanson & Kalyanam, 2007). One such example of traditional media having to adapt is with newspapers. Because of the decline in popularity of physical newspapers (Alterman, 2008), and the shifting desires of consumers when it comes to getting their news and classifieds (such as through substitute mediums such as the internet) (Fitzgerald, 2009; Herndon, 2012), news organisations have been increasingly required to turn to internet publication and alternative revenue sources in order to achieve the reach they once had (Herndon, 2012; Preston 2016). Many internet platforms, such as social media, have great application with regard to marketing activities, as they facilitate simple and direct avenues for targeting individual consumers whilst also being completely customisable on an individual basis (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The internet now pervades a great many aspects of an individual's everyday life. Stephen Hawking said, "We are all now connected by the Internet, like neurons in a giant brain". Thanks to online forums as well as online social media applications such as Facebook and Twitter, and with access to the internet, individuals can be connected and in direct and indirect communication with one another 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This has allowed for the creation of massive online communities that are not bound by space or time, instead driven by the desire to connect and participate (Butler et al., 2002).

2.6.1 'Cyberplace' and Video Games

With the rise of the internet changing the way individuals live their lives, so too has the way 'place' is perceived and the way communities can exist. Prior to the internet all that existed was physical place – geographically immediate communities such as neighbourhoods or towns and villages (Wellman, 2001). Because of the lack of technological communication tools that allowed for instantaneous communication amongst large numbers of people, community was restricted to existing in a purely physical sense, where members of a community would meet physically to communicate and interact with one another in a literal 'place' (Tönnies, 2012). This was the case for much of humanity's history, being somewhat alleviated by the invention of such telecommunication tools such as the telegraph and the telephone, which facilitated long-range communication between individuals (de Sola Pool, 1977; Standage, 1998). However, this communication was limited in its community-sustaining abilities, as the connection between the individuals involved ceased the moment the call ended or the telegraph was sent and the non-geographically based community presence was again lost (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

This changed with the advent of the internet. The internet, through its platforms for community such as online forums and social media, provides an alternative to physical place within which communities can be sustained (Wellman, 2001). This alternative place is referred to as 'cyberplace', and is the digital equivalent of the physical place (Wellman, 2001). In this function cyberplace acts as a community hub, substituting the traditional physical neighbourhood or fan club for an online equivalent whilst also allowing for all the additional benefits that internet community provides – such as not being bound by time or geographical location (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Community is allowed to grow and thrive within a cyberplace "as people connect with kindred spirits, engage in supportive and sociable relationships with them, and imbue their activity online with meaning, belonging, and identity" (Wellman, 2001, p. 229). Unlike with written or telephone communication cyberplace is persistent, when a member is not interacting within the cyberplace the community still exists and will be there when they return (Wellman, 2001). For this reason, cyberplace communities can span both the world and various time zones yet still have members be in direct connection and communication with one another at all times, provided the individual members have access to an internet connection. The social network website Facebook is the most successful example of a cyberplace community, and is one that has substituted physical community for many individuals (Kirkpatrick, 2011). This has led to a fall in traditional community interaction within the physical place, as Wellman (2001) states "Community interactions have moved to the private home" (p. 233). The entire world is predicted to have access to the internet by 2020

(Gross, 2013), and so this trend will only grow as more individuals gain the ability to move their community membership online.

With online access came online video games, and now a plethora of various entirely-online video games have come to exist. It is within the cyberplaces found within online video games that many online video game communities have developed. Two examples of these virtual worlds with large online communities are Second Life and World of Warcraft (Second Life, 2009; Blizzard, 2015), respectively. As previously discussed, cyberplace has largely replaced physical place for a lot of communities, and in video games the cyberplace takes the form of the virtual world in which the video game takes place (Wellman, 2001; Badrinarayanan et al., 2014). Players interact with and exert influence over both the virtual world and community in the cyberplace through the medium of their 'avatar', or chosen online representation of themselves (Badrinarayanan et al., 2014). Through interaction and collaboration players form community bonds, rules, rituals, and traditions within these virtual contexts not unlike those found in offline communities (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001; Kock, 2008; Badrinarayanan et al., 2014).

These cyberplace video game communities have reached very large sizes, in some cases comprising millions of individuals such as World of Warcraft in 2015 having 5 million concurrent players (Blizzard, 2015). This is again possible due to the utilities of online community removing time and place restrictions on membership and interaction (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For many users of online video games, the cyberplace community has entirely substituted the physical place community, and has led to negative stereotypes surrounds these sorts of gamers as 'fanboys', being unkempt and dirty, and living 'in their mother's basements', although this has been demonstrated to be a largely unfair attribution (Williams et al., 2008; Locke, 2012). Online communities within the cyberplace present opportunities for e-collaboration and e-commerce to take place in the form of teamwork and trade, such as within Second Life and World of Warcraft where the virtual worlds have been designed in such a way to support virtual trade and work involving geographically dispersed individuals (Kock, 2008). Overall it can be considered that cyberplace video game communities are just as valid a community as traditional physical place communities, sharing many of the same characteristics and utilities.

2.7 Video Game Brand Tribes (and the 'Console Wars')

Surrounding the various respective video game platforms and brands that exist within the market today are some very passionate brand communities. Currently in the video game platform market there exists a phenomenon referred to by authors such as Poole (2000), Harris (2015) and Orland (2016) as the 'Console Wars', a term used to describe the constant state of heavy competition to gain market share that the leading video game platform brands are engaged in – as well as the brand communities that act as the 'foot soldiers' in the war (Poole, 2000). Whilst Harris (2015) wrote about the console wars in the context of Nintendo and Sega in the 1980's, the then leading video game console brands, the analysis of he and Poole (2000) is just as relevant in today's market with the major brands of PC, Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo. Orland (2016) further reports on how this very brand war still rages well into the present. The Console Wars that currently exist within the video game platform market are a good example of brand competition where consumer communities have taken it upon themselves to assume part of the role of marketing their preferred brand over that of the competition, a particularly strong trait of brand tribes.

As discussed in Section 2.5.2 of this review of the literature, the brand communities that have formed around video game platform brands exhibit all the factors and traits that would suggest the existence of not only a strong brand community but that of a brand tribe (Cova & Cova, 2001; D'Alessandro, 2001; Muniz & O'guinn, 2001; Taute & Sierra, 2014).

Some study of community in the video game context has also been carried out by authors such as Badrinarayanan et al. (2014), who conducted research into a consumer community within a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) in order to better understand consumer behaviour within a virtual community. This was not focused around brand tribalism or even brand community however, but was rather about studying communities in a virtual context. Most research with regard to brand community and video games has been focused towards communities that exist through the medium of video games, rather than the brand communities that exist around the brand platforms upon which video games are played (Apperley, 2006; Badrinarayanan et al. 2014). Ultimately, there exists a gap in the literature when it comes to understanding brand tribes in general, let alone in the context of video game platform brand communities, perhaps largely due to a lack of current understanding as to what brand tribes actually are and how they influence the marketing environment. For this reason, research into said video game platform brand tribes is a field of study well worth pursuing, and

one that would add value to the existing literature for both academics and marketing practitioners alike.

2.8 Chapter Summary

The signs that brand tribes exist with the video game industry are apparent when measured by the parameters established by previous researchers of brand tribalism, but little investigation into this area has been undertaken. This chapter has identified a clear gap in the literature concerning brand tribes in the video games platforms context, and acknowledged a space for additional understanding of brand tribes in general to be gained. This gap is likely due to the more recent nature of this particular area of theory. Brand community as a whole was only truly established as an area of consumer behaviour theory by Muniz & O'guinn's work in their seminal paper *Brand Community* (2001), and the subset of brand community that is brand tribalism is even less researched. Consequently, this area of research has value to contribute to the greater marketing literature.

Discerning a better understanding of brand tribes in both the context of video game platforms and in general will be valuable for practitioners of marketing as well as academics. Understanding the motivation of consumers to become part of brand tribes will aid marketers in bringing general consumers of their brand's products into the brand tribe, as is recommended by Goulding et al. (2013) and Taute and Sierra (2014). Furthermore, it will help marketers in the rapidly-growing video game industry interact with existing video game platform brand tribes in order to maximise the effectiveness of relationship management, co-creation efforts, and how to best position their promotional efforts in order to capture this special audience. Knowing how to best handle a brand tribe would also be of great use in building sustainable competitive advantage for the brand around this already existing group of very brand loyal consumers (Barney, 1997).

Brand communities are a tough enough group of consumers to manage as it is, but brand tribes are an even tougher proposition. Given their brand loyalty constituting a religious nature, their deeper involvement in the brand that permeates their very identity as individuals, and their active desire to promote the brand to other consumers beyond the control of the brand's marketers, effectively managing this community of consumers becomes all the more crucial. Exploring video game brand tribes and attempting to understand the members that constitute them would bring real value to marketers within, and without, the video game industry, as well as academics in the field of marketing. This review of existing literature has found that brand

communities are a large force within a given brand (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001) and that brand tribes themselves can carry an even greater level of influence over the brand (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; D'Alessandro, 2001; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009; Taute & Sierra, 2014). Psychological ownership held by brand tribe members over their focal brands also becomes apparent when examined, and yields further guidance as to how a practitioner might manage a brand tribe. This carries important implications for practitioners conducting the management of these groups of consumers as well as those that study consumers, and these implications demand further consideration and research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to develop an understanding of those members that comprise video game platform brand tribes, as has been discussed in the previous two chapters. This chapter seeks to develop this discussion further, and will do so by firstly covering the relevant philosophical considerations (such as ontological and epistemological assumptions) along with theoretical assumptions, and then discussing the research design, sampling and data collection approaches, transcription, how the data was analysed, and finally how data quality was assured and any relevant ethical considerations that were made. As mentioned previously, the exploratory development of an understanding of a consumer segment, lends itself best to qualitative research methodology. Authors such as Creswell and Creswell (2017) state that the qualitative approach is where the inquirer often bases their knowledge claims upon constructionist perspectives (such as the meanings of individual experiences, and meanings constructed with an intent to develop a theme or pattern), advocacy/participatory perspectives (such as political, issue-oriented, collaborative, or change oriented), or a mixture of both. Qualitative research cannot simply be reduced to the methodology utilised or data analysis procedures. As such, qualitative research has been deemed appropriate for this context, and its use in this thesis will now be discussed.

Qualitative research is described by Punch (1998, p. 4) as quite simply being “empirical research where the data are not in the form of numbers”. A more comprehensive explanation put forth by Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 2) states that “Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. Strauss and Corbin (1990) further echo the assertion that qualitative research is a distinct entity from quantitative research, stating that by definition any research that produces findings or conclusions not formulated through statistical or other forms of quantified analysis should be viewed as qualitative. How this method is used by researchers can depend on a number of factors, such as: their ontological and epistemological beliefs, the purpose(s)/goal(s) of the research, the characteristics of the research participants, and intended audience of the research, those funding the research, and the position of the researchers themselves with regards to their environment (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013).

Qualitative research adopts a range of inquiry strategies in its search for understanding, including narratives, ethnographies, phenomenologies, case studies, and so forth. These various methods allow the researcher to collect relevant data from subjects and then develop pertinent themes from the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017); thus, presenting the researcher with the opportunity to conduct a thematic analysis which is one of many means by which qualitative data may be analysed (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Clake & Braun, 2014). This chapter serves to provide a comprehensive explanation of the methods and methodology that has been utilised in the course of this research, the theory behind the methodology, how the sampling was conducted, and finally how the data was gathered and analysed.

3.2 Philosophical Considerations

Before the conduction of any research can take place, one must take into consideration the philosophy surrounding both the research and the foundations of the ideas supporting it. To sufficiently understand and appreciate the purpose of a piece of research in the greater environment within which it exists, as well as any implications as to what, why, or how the research is performed, the greater philosophy of research must first be considered (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001). Establishing this philosophical perspective mandates that the researcher must make some assumptions regarding the two chief dimensions: the nature of science and the nature of society (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The nature of science has two possible approaches; either subjective or objective, and both these philosophical approaches are defined by several assumptions concerning ontology (reality), epistemology (knowledge), human nature (pre-determined or not) and methodology (Holden & Lynch, 2004). Both objectivism and subjectivism can be placed at opposite ends of a continuum and various philosophical positions may be found between them (Holden & Lynch, 2004). Burrell and Morgan (1979) discuss how the philosophical assumptions surrounding human nature alter depending on whether the researcher identifies humans as controllers or the controlled. Lastly is the assumption regarding the methodology – the researcher's tool box, representing the researcher's means with which to conduct an investigation (Holden & Lynch, 2004). All of the above assumptions are in essence concerned with the nature, validity, and limits of inquiry of the research (Rosenau, 1991). The assumptions will now be discussed in the following paragraphs, alongside a more comprehensive description of the ontological and epistemological assumptions behind this piece of research.

Ontological assumptions concern the actual reality of the subject being investigated – that is to say, whether the nature of reality can be based in true existence or whether what is

considered 'reality' is merely determined by an individual's own mind (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Ontology has been defined by Crotty (1998) as being concerned with the nature of existence, the structure of reality as such, and therefore ultimately the study of being, and Gray (2013, p. 19) states that "Ontology is the study of being, that is, the nature of existence and what constitutes reality". Within ontological discussion there exist two main schools of thought – positivism and relativism (Gray, 2013). Positivism states that the reality of the world is independent of an individual's knowledge of it and that it exists as it does regardless of how it is perceived, whereas relativism states that reality is unique to the individual perceiving it, and that what is reality for one individual may be a very different reality for another (Gray, 2013). This is an important distinction when considering research, as whether an individual views reality as objective or subjective in this manner will reflect upon both their actions and answers (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

Holden and Lynch (2004) note a general positivist stance amongst researchers towards ontology, stating that most research completed within organisational science has been done so with the assumption that reality is objective and exists waiting to be discovered, and that this knowledge can then be identified and communicated to others. This is where assumptions regarding epistemology, the study of what it means to know, come into play, as well as how we as individuals may be able to communicate our understanding of the world in the form of knowledge to other individuals. Epistemology provides the philosophical background for deciding what kinds of knowledge are legitimate and accurate (Gray, 2013), and to that effect what constitutes false versus true knowledge (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Gettier (1963) questioned the very essence of what constitutes knowledge in whether justified true belief can be counted as knowledge, or as something else entirely. Crotty (1998) asserts that there are three different epistemologies; objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism, all with different theoretical foundations. Of the three, constructionism is the more moderate epistemological position, between the two extremes that are objectivism and subjectivism. In choosing one of these three epistemological stances the researcher must identify, explain, and justify their philosophical footing (Crotty, 1998).

Constructionism, the middle-ground approach to epistemology, supposes that truth cannot be discovered, but rather comes into existence in and out of engagement with the world's realities (Crotty, 1998). It views reality as a 'construction' of society – the product of societal and cultural belief and assumption, and thus promotes a focus on analysing the process by which reality is created. Because reality is inherent to the process through which it is created, knowledge must be gained through understanding that process (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). This epistemological approach demands that the researcher focus on the interactions

taking place between the respective entities, and ask questions such as; How do individuals act towards one another and objects in their world? What meanings do they attach to them? (Esterberg, 2002). Thus, this study has adopted a constructionist epistemological stance with the belief that individuals attach their own meaning to objects (such as brand or fellow consumer), as well as to their reality. This line of thinking is supported by Crotty (1998), based on the assumption that individuals' interpretations of reality and their consequential constructions of knowledge are rooted in the culture and society they are a part of. Although they are conscious of the fact that other individuals may disagree based on their own personal ontological and epistemological perspectives, it is the researcher's personal belief that constructionism appears to be the most appropriate approach to the research being conducted in this context.

3.3 Theoretical Assumptions

In discussing the theoretical assumptions upon which this research is based, the assumptions underpinning qualitative research as a whole should first be provided and themselves discussed in order to show what relevance to this context of research they may have, as well as their suitability as qualitative methodology. Flick, Von Kardorff, and Steinke (2004) explored and defined these assumptions, concluding key points relevant to this particular context. Firstly, they state that "Social reality is understood as a shared product and attribution of meanings", and how "Processual nature and reflexivity of social reality are assumed" (Flick et al., 2004, p. 7). These points pertain to the individual perceptions humans have on their own reality. Flick et al. (2004, p. 7) further propose that "'Objective' life circumstances are made relevant to a life-world through subjective meanings", and thirdly that "The communicative nature of social reality permits the reconstruction of constructions of social reality to become the starting point for research". These ideas are the foundation of constructivism.

Flick et al. (2004, p. 6) define social reality as "the result of meanings and contexts that are jointly created in social interaction". While these theoretical concepts can be considered foundational to qualitative research as a whole, they do not relate to any one specific theoretical assumption for any given specific methodology. Spiggle (1994) states that investigators attempt to understand informants by grasping a concept, idea, or experience in their terms. This understanding is but one 'layer' of meaning, to be built upon by other conceptual layers (Wallendorf & Brucks, 1993). We "may grasp their meanings and experiences by translating between their "text" (e.g. passage in an interview) – the target domain, the distant text – and our

own experience, knowledge, and ideas – the source domain” (Spiggle, 1994, p. 499). It is in this case, the context of this study, that the research will take a social constructivist stance.

Social constructivism is primarily a theory of cognitive development where the emphasis has shifted from the individual as sole meaning-maker of the interaction between individual and environment, to a view of collectively constructed meaning (Sivan, 1986). It is described by Sivan (1986) as being socialisation; the process facilitating the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and dispositions that enable the individual to participate in their society, as well as the means whereby an individual learns and understands the needs and motives that underlie human relations and the modes of action necessary to interact with other people, objects, and ideas in an environment. This is expanded upon by Powell and Kalina (2009), who state that social constructivism is a learning process through which knowledge is gained through an alternative, more social environment rather than in isolation as with traditional cognitive constructivism.

The approach of social constructivism has been chosen for this research as it is appropriate given the context; namely, to investigate an as-yet unexplored area of consumer behaviour and develop some insight into a given consumer segment. Communities are highly social entities by nature, and thus it is reasonable to assume that the ideas and knowledge possessed by members of video game platform communities, and indeed brand tribes, will be the product of not only the individual's thoughts but also their peers'. This is backed up by authors such as D'Alessandro (2001), Cova and Pace (2006), and Taute and Sierra (2014), who espouse the idea that brand tribes develop and possess their own rules and knowledge, as well as foster strong bonds between members. This strength of the bonds between members would imply that social constructivism would have a greater influence over an individual's acquisition and formulation of knowledge, and that this would too be influenced by the group rules established by the tribe as a whole, so the social constructivism approach is appropriate in this regard. Furthermore, this approach to research fits the ontological and epistemological assumptions established earlier, and so social constructivism will form the basis for this research.

3.4 Methodology

The methodology is a critical aspect of the research process. Selection of the correct methodology, one that properly matches the methodology and associated methods employed with ontological, epistemological, and theoretical assumptions, is essential to the conduction of valid research (Holden & Lynch, 2004). A methodology is the strategy employed by a researcher

– the means by which an understanding of a particular subject may be developed (Crotty, 1998). As mentioned previously, the researcher has elected to adopt a constructionist epistemological stance for the purposes of this research, as well as having selected an appropriate qualitative method. In selecting an appropriate methodology/method mix for the goals of this study, the intention and purview of the research was carefully considered and the mix prudently decided upon, as a mismatch of methodology and research problem can produce illegitimate results (Holden & Lynch, 2004). Consequently, the methodology selected by the researcher for this given context was thematic analysis, utilising semi-structured interviews as the data-collection method.

3.4.1 Thematic Analysis

The method employed for this research is thematic analysis. It is a methodology which allows for the identification and analysis of patterns and themes in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2013), and is key to comparing and contrasting different sets of qualitative data. As such it has established itself as a core method for qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), but only more recently has it begun to achieve the level of legitimacy and recognition held by more traditional methodologies such as grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The experiences and perspectives/opinions of those being investigated are inherently subjective (Spiggle, 1994), and thus thematic analysis is appropriate as it is a search for themes that emerge as being important to describing the phenomenon (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997) and is a form of pattern recognition within data where emergent themes become categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). It is therefore hoped that thematic analysis will facilitate the development of genuine insight into the context being researched.

A substantial benefit to employing thematic analysis as a methodology is that it is an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing data, it is easy to apply to a range of theoretical and epistemological foundations, and it generates unforeseeable insights into the context being explored, all whilst acting as an effective summariser of the key features of otherwise verbose amounts of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). What makes thematic analysis flexible is that it does not need to adhere to any particular theoretical foundations for language or other frameworks for explaining human behaviour, due to the nature of investigating patterning across language (Braun & Clark, 2013). Thematic analysis' independence from rigid theory also means that it can be applied to any given theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2013); in the case of this study social constructivist.

When conducting thematic analysis, it is important to ensure you make the correct decisions regarding approach. These include: deciding what is and is not a theme, using

inductive versus theoretical analysis, and assessing fit with ontological and epistemological assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With regard to the inductive versus theoretical analysis stance; an inductive approach entails the themes being identified are strongly linked to the data themselves (Patton, 1990) where coding is conducted without trying to fit it into an existing theoretical frame, whereas in theoretical analysis coding is driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Successive decisions then involve the level at which the themes are analysed, be it semantic or latent. In the semantic approach what the participant says or writes is taken at face value and the researcher does not look beyond that, only identifying themes from the explicit or surface meanings of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Contrarily, the latent approach looks beyond surface meaning in the data and instead seeks to identify underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations and ideologies that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic level of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes that are unearthed on the latent level of data tend to be of a constructionist nature, which keeps in line with the epistemological assumptions of this research. Thematic analysis is therefore regarded by the researcher to be the best method to employ with regard to analysing the data collected, due to its flexibility, adaptability, ability to analyse latent themes, and suitability towards the selected epistemology.

3.5 Research Design

In order to produce the optimum results, the research itself must be intelligently designed. The mark of good qualitative research design is said by Ritchie et al. (2013) to be one which has a clearly defined purpose, in which there is coherence between the research questions and the methods or approaches proposed, and which generates data which is valid and reliable. In order to best achieve this some research questions were developed to help guide the research process. It is imperative to get the scope of the research questions right, as should they be too broad then they will provide little to nothing in the way of guidance for the planning and execution of the research, and conversely should they be too narrow they can miss what is meant to be the target of the investigation or obfuscate rather than encourage new discoveries (Flick, 2004). As such, the research questions by which this study was conducted are below:

1. Why is a video game platform brand tribe member part of a respective platform's brand tribe? Is membership based on individual traits?
2. What general/social utility does a video game platform brand tribe hold for its members?
3. Does video game platform brand tribe membership affect a member's consumption behaviour? If so, how?

These questions aid in grounding the research process in an exploratory manner, whilst guiding interview questions in maximising their potential for gathering insight into this as yet unexplored area of investigation.

The intent of the research design is to provide a plan for both the collection and analysis of data that will allow the researcher to attempt to answer the questions they have posed. Due to the exploratory nature of this study it would be most appropriate to use qualitative research methods. Primary data was collected via semi-structured interviews with participants sampled from internet forums, and the collected data was analysed using thematic analysis. Due to video games and the online nature of their communities, it was expected that those participants sourced from the internet would be appropriately representative of video game community members from the respective platforms as a whole.

3.6 Data Collection

How the data is collected during a study can be as important as what is collected. The following sections discuss how the sample was chosen and how data was collected and then analysed.

3.6.1 Sample Criteria

The general intent of conducting survey research is to collect data representative of a population (Bartlett, Kotrlik, & Higgins, 2001). Inappropriate samples can be detrimental to the quality and accuracy of a piece of research (Bartlett et al., 2001), and thus how the samples are selected is an important consideration for a researcher. In this study the appropriate criteria were identified and used to ascertain which participants could be suitable versus those that could not be, and this knowledge was then used in the selection of fitting research participants. The use of criteria is vital in guiding research decisions, allowing future researchers using the same study procedure to arrive at similar conclusions or so that the outcomes reached can be criticised rationally (Merkens, 2004).

Previous research into brand tribalism is very limited, with few studies focussed on developing a better understanding of brand tribes and fewer still that intentionally examine brand tribes in context than unintentionally (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Cova & Cova, 2001; D'Alessandro, 2001; Charmley, Garry, & Ballantine, 2012; Taute & Sierra, 2014). What is known regarding brand tribe members is that they exhibit some common traits, including; a passion for their preferred brand, a belief in the superiority of their brand and the inferiority of

competing brands, and strong community bonds and interaction with other members of the brand tribe. These criteria were used as the basis for the selection of the study sample that was involved in the study, as well as some more general criteria such as participants being over the age of 18 for ethics purposes, as well as being based in New Zealand for remuneration purposes. It is believed that the sampling of participants using the above criteria will provide data representative of a brand tribe that may build an understanding transferable to specific brand tribe contexts outside of both video games and New Zealand.

3.6.2 Sample Recruitment

The recruitment of the sample utilised was done so in a manner that ensured that the sample would meet the required criteria, and so be properly representative of video game brand tribes. This was achieved through online forums such as Reddit and Facebook, where the researcher made a post briefly explaining the study and the criteria that potential participants would be required to possess, as well as how to become involved should they desire to. These online sources were deemed appropriate to recruit from as video game communities, including brand tribes, largely exist in online spaces due to the nature of gaming and its associated hardware. This process employed participant self-selection, where participants were incentivised by a \$30 Mighty Ape (online retailer) gift voucher to volunteer their time. Potential participants contacted the researcher via their email, and were asked to read an Information Sheet (Appendix 1) further detailing the study before organising an interview.

The researcher received a large response to the advertisements posted on both Reddit and Facebook, with an excess of willing potential participants being in contact. From this number, 14 participants were selected on a first-come, first-served basis. Reaching saturation when conducting interviews is important for collecting sufficient data (Goulding, 2005), and research by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) showed that the point of saturation is around 12 participants, so 14 was the number of participants selected in order to best guarantee saturation was achieved, and it is the researcher's belief that saturation was in fact achieved. The participants were largely male, with only one female participant taking part, and encompassed a variety of ages and gaming platforms of choice, as well as ethnic and social backgrounds. Table 1 in the following section summarises the participants in this study. Finally, prior to the conduction of any interview participants were asked to read and digitally sign a Consent Form (Appendix 2). This was part of ensuring the anonymity of participant identities and information they provided, and as such any names in following sections or chapters are pseudonyms in accordance with that intention.

3.7 Method – Semi-structured Interviews

When selecting a method by which to conduct an investigation, it is integral to achieving a desired outcome that an appropriate method is employed. Because of the ability to enquire openly about situational meanings or motives for action, collect everyday theories and self-interpretations in a differentiated and open way, and because of the possibility of discursive understanding through interpretation, semi-structured interviews provide important opportunities for developing an in-depth understanding of the participants involved (Hopf, 2004). Additionally, semi-structured interviews are effective for exploring the perceptions and opinions of participants regarding oftentimes complex or sensitive issues whilst allowing for further probing for more information and answer clarification (Barriball & While, 1994). This allows the researcher to collect expert knowledge from those participants within the chosen research context, record and analyse their subjective perspectives on the context being studied, or alternatively the collection of data pertaining to the participants' biographies directly (Hopf, 2004). As this is what the research is seeking to do, to develop an understanding of a specific consumer subgroup through investigation, this method was deemed appropriate and was chosen.

Semi-structured interviews are conducted through the use of a set of interview questions to help structure the interview, but are flexible and allow for deviation from the core structure in order to touch on other areas of the conversation that would otherwise be missed by the interviewer (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001). This allows for a broader and more thorough level of discovery than can be gained from structured or unstructured interviews, as well as giving the interviewer more control over where the interview flows and what areas are discussed, ultimately allowing for the generation of greater insight than could otherwise be achieved. The interview guide used in this study can be found in Appendix 3. It begins simply with introductory questions, before progressing deeper into more brand tribe relevant questioning. Questions were developed using the topics of the literature review as a guide in order to best attempt to touch upon all relevant topics and themes. Participants arranged for a suitable time to be interviewed, and signed and returned the electronic Consent Form prior to the time of interview. The interview would take place and after its conclusion the participant's email would be forwarded to the research supervisor to arrange remuneration. The location in which the interviews took place varied, as they were conducted remotely via Skype, but as a result both the interviewer and interviewee could choose somewhere comfortable and private during the interviews. All interviews were recorded through a computer program with the participants' permission for the purposes of transcription and analysis.

The interviews varied in length, with the shortest being 40 minutes long and the longest being 90 minutes long. When the total number of interviews to be conducted was chosen, saturation, or the point where no additional information can be found in further interviews, was considered (Goulding, 2005). Guest et al. (2006) used statistical analysis to attempt to provide evidence-based recommendations on where the point of saturation actually is likely to occur, due to the fact that saturation as an idea alone does not provide anything in the way of guidance with regard to performing quality research. Their findings showed that saturation occurs within the first 12 interviews conducted (Guest et al., 2005), and so in order to provide a buffer zone for data quality, 14 interviews were conducted in this instance. This number of interviews is in line with similar research (Heath, Tynan, & Ennew, 2011), which lends credibility to the choice to conduct 14 interviews. Saturation was considered to be reached after the 14 interviews conducted as no new data points were coming through, and so no more were necessary. The semi-structured interviews were thusly used to ascertain various aspects of perspectives and opinions regarding brand tribalism and consumer behaviour for those considered members of video game platform brand tribes. A sample that included all platforms and various backgrounds added variety to the responses given, and aided in developing a richer picture of the context being investigated. Table 1 below provides an overview of the participants in this study.

#	Participant	Age	Gender	Platform of Choice
1	James	32	Male	PlayStation
2	Carter	33	Male	Nintendo
3	Harry	21	Male	Xbox
4	Sarah	18	Female	PlayStation
5	Vladimir	20	Male	PC
6	Noah	25	Male	PC
7	Colin	19	Male	PlayStation
8	Max	22	Male	PC
9	Trevor	20	Male	Xbox
10	Frank	19	Male	PC
11	David	28	Male	PlayStation
12	Arnold	19	Male	PlayStation
13	Arthur	19	Male	PC
14	Wayne	19	Male	PC

Table 1: Summary of Sample Demographics

3.8 Transcription

Transcription is described by Kowal and O'Connell (2004) as being a graphical representation of selected aspects of the behaviour displayed by individuals engaged in conversation. Transcriptions of conversations are necessary in transforming what would otherwise be a temporarily communicated set of words into a permanent paper or electronic form that can be employed for analysis. Accuracy is paramount in when creating a valid and reliable transcription. Considerations must be made not only to the words spoken (known as verbal features), but also to their general 'sound' – their pitch or volume for example (known as prosodic features), and finally any relevant non-linguistic behaviour (Kowal & O'Connell, 2004). In the context of this research, transcription aims to report all relevant details of the interviews that have been conducted in order to best provide accurate materials for analysis. Transcription was completed by a third-party service in order to provide the highest quality as can be expected of a professional, compared to that which the researcher would potentially be capable of. The third-party was made aware of the privacy and security concerns regarding the raw data, and followed due procedures to ensure the complete security of all participant information as well as signing a confidentiality form (Appendix 4).

3.9 Data Analysis

Due to the nature of the study being carried out and the data being collected, thematic analysis was selected as an appropriate method for analysing the data. The thematic analysis conducted followed the guidelines laid out by Braun and Clarke (2006) in their seminal paper on thematic analysis in psychology, which discusses thematic analysis from a psychological perspective. In this article the authors espouse the benefits of taking such a perspective when approaching thematic analysis, as well as producing a guide on how it should best be utilised. The six phases of the approach are; familiarising yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and lastly producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data analysis followed these guidelines, and themes were drawn out from the data. Interpretation's subjective nature makes it difficult to present in a linear fashion (Spiggle, 1994), but through using thematic analysis many themes were developed. Quotations were taken from the interview transcripts and reported in the findings section, Chapter Four. The coding of themes produced 15 items of varying strength and importance. These themes were

then grouped into two main categories; seven within Community, and eight within Brand Tribalism. Themes are discussed individually, with relevant quotations used to supplement the findings, and links to appropriate literature produced. Through this approach, the discussion therefore flows in a logical progression, and ensures that the data is faithful to the intentions of the research.

3.10 Evaluating Data Quality

Ensuring that the data collected in the course of research is of a high quality is a priority for researchers. Whilst the definition of what makes data 'high quality' may vary between academic sources, it can generally be considered to be high quality if it is "fit for (its) intended uses in operations, decision making and planning" (Redman, 2008). Compared to quantitative research however, which produces data far more conclusively quantifiable, qualitative research is by nature much less straightforward with regard to its data, and for this reason there exists a fair amount of dispute amongst academics as to appropriately measuring qualitative data quality (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). In order to evaluate the data collected in this research in a suitable manner, Guba and Lincoln's (1981, 1982, 1985) concept of 'Trustworthiness' has been selected.

Trustworthiness is a measure of quality that replaces the concepts of reliability and validity that are traditionally used in the evaluation of data quality, and is comprised of four key aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Shenton (2004) provides an accurate outline of trustworthiness: credibility describes the researcher's attempt to ensure their study "measures or tests what is actually intended" (p. 64), transferability describes the researcher providing sufficient detail of the context of study that an individual may be able to cross-apply the findings from their study to a suitably similar situation in a manner that provides some insight, dependability describes how the researcher should aim to construct a reproducible study that would in theory in the same context provide the same results, although due to the nature of qualitative research this is often not realistically achievable, and finally, confirmability describes how the researcher must demonstrate that any findings that arise from their research do so from the data analysed and not any biases they may hold. In the following segments, each of these key aspects will be discussed in more detail.

3.10.1 Credibility

The credibility of research participants is a chief concern during a qualitative research process. According to authors such as Hopf (2004), this is especially true with regard to

research utilising semi-structured interviews. Patton (1999, p. 1190) proposed that the credibility issue for qualitative inquiry depends on three distinct but related inquiry elements: rigorous techniques and methods for gathering high quality data that are carefully analysed, with attention to issues of validity, reliability, and triangulation; the credibility of the researcher, which is dependent on training, experience, track record, status, and presentation of self; and philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry, that is, a fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis, purposeful sampling, and holistic thinking.

The method and methodology used in the course of the research is also important for credibility. With regard to semi-structured interviews, validity and reliability depend not on repeating the same words every time you ask each respective participant the same question, but rather on conveying the same meaning consistency (Hardie, Shilbury, Ware, & Bozzi, 2010). This is because it can be expected that, due to lexical and linguistic differences between individuals, participants may produce statements with the same meaning yet different wordings (Hardie et al., 2010). Paying heed to facilitating equivalence of meaning between participants' statements also aids producing comparable data.

Technical rigour is another important aspect of maintaining credibility during qualitative research, as valid analysis is heavily dependent on this rigour when establishing the credibility of qualitative findings (Patton, 1999). In order to be able to produce credible data the researcher must ensure that the interview process is valid, encourage the participants to produce and divulge useful data, set the epistemological and ontological beliefs that will frame the research, and finally, be credible and non-biased themselves. In the context of this study all efforts to ensure credibility of the research were carried out, as guaranteeing the credibility of the study was of great importance.

3.10.2 Transferability

The transferability of a piece of research is an aspect of its validity; specifically, its external validity and what additional contexts its findings may be applied to (Malterud, 2001). As Malterud (2001, p. 485) states in her piece on qualitative research "The aim of research is to produce information that can be shared and applied beyond the study setting", and so transferability pertains to what contexts outside of the specific study context that the findings are applicable to. Thus, the study design should reflect that consideration for producing transferable results (Malterud, 2001).

Steps can be taken during the research process to enhance the transferability of research results. Baxter and Eyles (1997) discuss Lincoln and Guba's (1981, 1982, 1985) concept of trustworthiness, putting forth two practices that may aid in satisfying the criteria needed for transferability; 'purposeful sampling' and 'thick description'. Purposeful sampling is when the individuals within a segment being studied are intentionally and specifically selected based on some defining criteria that is intended to be examined in the course of the research, rather than by probability or other more random sampling methods. Thick description is a process by which when discussing or explaining human behaviour the context within which that behaviour is taking place is also discussed/explained. This allows for readers outside of the context to better be able to contextualise the behaviour being examined. These two approaches were utilised in this study. Purposeful sampling was accomplished through the targeting of enthusiastic video game platform consumers that match brand tribe criteria to sample for interview. Thick description was done through thorough discussion of the context as well as the behaviour of the participants sampled.

Because this study aims to produce new understanding of a particular segment of consumers within a specific context, there are naturally limitations on how the findings of this research can be transferred. The literature used to inform this study however spans a plethora of contexts, especially with regard to brand community and tribalism, and so there exists potential for transferability of the video game platform context into other brand community/tribe contexts. The methodology by which this study was conducted further aids in facilitating transferability.

3.10.3 Dependability

The dependability of a piece of research pertains to how reliably consistent it is, thus best ensuring dependability relies on eliminating as much variability from its sources as possible (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Lincoln and Guba (1985), and then Baxter and Eyles (1997), suggest that dependability is in part about being able to match certain findings with the same contexts or phenomena over time, and as such, accurate documentation of the research context is important. As a result, dependability is largely in the hands of the researcher, due to it being reliant on the researcher maintaining their own uniformity in relating their findings and interpretations to the same appropriate contexts in a consistent manner. To combat the subjective nature of an individual's interpretation of data, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that low-inference participant descriptors be used, as well as using multiple researchers to increase dependability. This is to say that a second pair of eyes should look over the interpretations of the data to ensure consistency.

Dependability can be compromised when the interpretation of data by the researcher or participant(s) is inappropriate or incorrect given the subject. This phenomenon is labelled by LeCompte and Goetz (1982) as poor definition of analytical constructs and premises, and is the result of the subjective nature of interpretation of concepts and themes by both the researcher and those being researched. In a qualitative research process such as this, involving interviews with participants of varying ontological and epistemological perspectives means a variance of interpretation is likely, but can be combatted through the use of a supervisory entity acting to ensure that the research process is standardised and opportunity for misinterpretation, or variable interpretation, is minimised as best possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Such an entity was present in this study in the form of the research supervisor, who through cooperating with the student researcher facilitated what would be described by Baxter and Eyles (1997) as an auditee-auditor research relationship, and in essence an effective form of maximising both appropriate interpretation and research dependability.

3.10.4 Confirmability

The confirmability of research is dependent on whether or not the researcher has allowed their own biases to reflect in their research findings and/or practices, and is defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 290) as “the degree to which findings are determined by the respondents and conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interests or perspectives of the inquirer”. Removing all bias from the research process is an unrealistic proposition, as regardless of attempts made by the researcher to reduce or remove their own personal views from influencing the study, it is still ultimately designed by humans who inherently hold their own subconscious biases. Any data produced by human elements, be it the responses given by participants or the study itself made by the researcher, will always be at least marginally slanted by subjective perspective rather than objective truth. For this reason, the intrusion of bias into any given study is inevitable (Shenton, 2004). This is again true in the context of a qualitative study, where the researcher may be able to observe closely the subject matter and draw first-hand conclusions, but this closeness can make impartiality questionable (Patton, 1999).

As some degree of bias in the research is unavoidable, efforts must instead be geared towards mitigation of its interpretation-warping effects. Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) suggestion towards this is a holistic approach, focussing on both the investigator and the interpretation when assessing confirmability. This could be done so through the keeping of a diary or auditing of the research by a third party. Baxter and Eyles (1997) suggested that better ensuring the objectivity of the research can be done through the researcher accounting for their own biases

and motivations, and explaining how they may have affected their interpretation of the data as a result.

In this study, both Lincoln and Guba's (1985) and Baxter and Eyles' (1997) methodologies were employed in order to maximise the confirmability of the research. With regard to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) method a research supervisor acted as a third-party auditor to the research and interpretation processes. In fulfilling Baxter and Eyles' (1997) method the researcher took care to reflect on and note their own personal biases they may hold towards the studied context. The researcher is an experienced 'gamer' themselves, and has been a part of video game culture and communities for the vast majority of their life. However, in this context this insight into video games and their respective communities acts as a valuable aid to understanding the communities and individuals being investigated. Furthermore, any analysis or interpretation of the data collected and behaviours observed was supported by existing literature and thus was grounded in legitimate academic research, rather than simply the subjective interpretation of the researcher.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Ethical concerns are an important part of a piece of research, and researchers must consider any and all ethical issues surrounding their study (Esterberg, 2002). Such concerns may include, but are not exclusive to, the treatment of the individuals involved, the ethics of the interview process, and the ensuring of the confidentiality of participant identity and personal information. In order to uphold these ethical requirements a low-risk ethics application was made to the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, which was accepted prior to the initiation of research (Appendix 4). The application largely centred on acquiring sufficient consent and the ensuring of confidentiality. The requirements for the application were quickly met as the research is a completely voluntary study involving non-vulnerable adult participants being interviewed for a brief period, and all safety and privacy concerns were thoroughly addressed.

Prior to any interviews taking place, all participants were provided both an Information sheet to read and a Consent Form to accept and reply to. The Information Sheet outlined all important details regarding the research being conducted, such as research intent, what was being investigated, and contact details for both the primary researcher and the research supervisor should the participant desire further information. On the Consent Form the intent of the research was once again provided, as well as important details regarding the privacy and

security of the data being collected. The acceptance of this form bound both the participant's consent to use their data and the researcher's obligation to the security and privacy of said data. Participants were also offered the ability to have their data expunged from the study at any time up until three weeks before final submittal of the completed research, and were informed that the finalised thesis would be publicly accessible through online university databases. Some of the measures taken to ensure participant anonymity include the changing of real names to pseudonyms for use in the thesis text and all data being kept on password-protected devices accessible only by the researcher. The supervisor of this research project will keep possession of the digital Consent Forms for a period of five years. All participants consented to the conditions of the research process. Through taking the aforementioned measures to ensure an ethical process, as well as the general lack of risk surrounding the context of the research, it is believed that this research fulfils all specified required ethical criteria, and has been conducted in a manner pursuant to these criteria without compromise.

3.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter aimed to provide a sufficient overview of the qualitative research methodology employed in order to explore the topics discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. This chapter firstly discussed the relevant philosophical considerations and theoretical assumptions that have been made in the course of this research. This was followed by an explanation of the methodology employed in the conduction of this research, in this case thematic analysis. Next, the research design was discussed, followed by detailing of how the samples and their criteria were selected. The method employed to gather data, semi-structured interviews, was then discussed, as well as how the data would then be transcribed for analysis purposes. The actual data analysis was then established, along with how quality of the data would be ensured. Finally, the ethical considerations surrounding conducting such a study were discussed. Chapter Four will now provide an exploration of the findings from the data collected.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the data gathered from the 14 semi-structured interviews in order to better develop insight into the topics put forth in Chapter One and answer the research questions. Thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data, keeping in line with the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The coding of the data eventually generated 15 separate themes of note, under the umbrella themes of Community and Brand Tribalism (see Table 2 below).

Community	Brand Tribalism
Community Interaction	Aspects of Platform
Frequency	'Superiority'
Benefits of Community	Bonds to Brand and
Interaction	Community
Barriers to Community	Opposition to Alternative
Membership	Platforms
Where Friends Play	Loyalty Elasticity
Toxicity	Psychological Ownership and
Online Community vs. Offline	Identity
Community	Nostalgia's Role
Influence of Community	Participation in Platform
Interaction on Spending	Promotion
Behaviour	Brand Tribal in the Past

Table 2: Map of Themes

First, the participants' history regarding gaming is discussed, providing some background on the participants and a brief overview of the amount of time that gaming has been a present factor in their respective lives. Following this, a thorough description of the themes encountered during the research is presented, alongside relevant quotes from the interviews and references to the appropriate literature. The establishing of findings allows this research to effectively build upon existing literature in this area, and provide a strong foundation for further discussion and future research directives.

4.2 Participant Gaming History

4.2.1 Tenure Gaming

Most participants have been playing video games for the majority of their lives. Refer to Table 3 below for a full list of participants and their tenure gaming.

Participant	Current Age	Number of Years Gaming
James	32	22
Carter	33	13
Harry	21	18
Sarah	18	14
Vladimir	20	12
Noah	25	17
Colin	19	11
Max	22	9
Trevor	20	15
Frank	19	13
David	28	24
Arnold	19	8
Arthur	19	9
Wayne	19	11

Table 3: Participant Tenure Gaming

To calculate the number of years gaming for each participant, the researcher used the ages established in the previous section and deducted them from the participants' current ages.

As gaming has been a feature in large parts of the participants' lives, if not the outright majority, then it is reasonable to suggest that psychological ownership over their preferred brand, and indeed gaming in general, has resulted at least partly due to their tenure gaming. As will be discussed in Section 4.4.5, one of the key methods of building psychological ownership over a target is through 'coming to intimately know the target' (Pierce et al, 2003). Because participants reported having been with their chosen respective platform for most of their gaming tenure, it is reasonable to expect that during that time they have truly come to intimately know and understand their respective platforms, having experienced the platforms over the course of multiple iterations and gaming generations. With said platforms have been present for such a significant portion of participants' lives, it is easy to see how the platforms

could have been established as a part of who they are as individuals, and properly become a part of their identities. This further explains how participants came to be within brand tribes, as brand being part of identity is a key theme in brand tribe members (D'Alessandro, 2001).

4.3 Community

4.3.1 Community Interaction Frequency

It was found that whilst the frequency of participants' interaction with their respective communities varied, participants would engage in interaction with other community members at least a couple of times per week, if not on a daily basis. All participants reported that they did in fact engage in regular interaction with other members of their respective platform's communities, whether in-game, through online forums, or simply through the platform's own applications and services. The nature of the interactions ranged from simple light chatting, to in-depth discussion, knowledge sharing, product recommendation, and so forth. Some participants reported consistently interacting with their respective community every day, sometimes for multiple hours at a time.

"Every day, I normally play for at least six hours a day on average"

Arthur, PC

"On a fairly daily basis. It depends: it changes as my tie changes. In the last two years of high school it was half-hourly; I would be there constantly always. (...) last year I had to break off ties with that as I started university and I just sort of started (interacting) once a day"

Frank, PC

Other participants reported a far lesser frequency of interaction, interacting once or twice a week with other community members. This is often due to them possessing reduced free time as a result of work/education commitments, family obligations, or other life circumstances.

"Maybe once or twice a week on a chat room. (...) In terms of my own family, I probably play Mario Kart with my six year old daughter once or twice a week."

Carter, Nintendo

"A couple of times a week, I am at university and I can't do as much as I'd like but for sure, a couple of times a week."

Colin, PlayStation

"Probably every two weeks, where I can sit down and properly play some games."

Trevor, Xbox

This frequency of interaction is important when considering community bond in the context of brand tribes as a key component of brand tribe membership, and indeed greater community membership, is community bond and interaction (Taute & Sierra, 2014). As Taute and Sierra (2014) espouse, brand tribes possess a far stronger degree of bond between members when compared to a more general brand community. It is therefore logical that the enhanced brand enthusiasm that the participants possess can be at least partially attributed to the consistent interaction they have with other members of their respective platform's community, as well as this enthusiasm being a direct result of said community interaction. That is to say, interaction with other community members helped establish the respective platform as a participant's preferred brand, and then increased interaction frequency occurred as a result of this newfound brand fervour. This is further suggested by Muniz and O'guinn's (2001) description of community interaction as the medium through which factors such as legitimacy, rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility can be communicated, defining an individual's place within the community.

4.3.2 Benefits of Community Interaction

Participants reported a range of benefits or reasons for participating in their respective platform's communities, the main three being reported by almost every participant being; Information and Knowledge Sharing, Shared Experience, and Socialisation.

Firstly, Information and Knowledge Sharing pertains to participants seeking out information and knowledge regarding the games they play, the platforms they use, and so forth. Participants reported that engaging with their respective platform's communities was the way they stay informed about their platform or the games they play on said platform. This information ranged from simple tips for playing better, to news about the platform, what the general opinion is regarding certain subjects of interest, and technical help.

"A lot of it is staying up to date (...) Looking at new things that are coming in the future (...) It's informative, you find out the latest news and latest things that you need to know"

Noah, PC

"I think the number one thing I get out of it is like bug fixing or technical assistance (...) the PC community is very large and then there are also a lot of people that know a lot of stuff and people are often willing to share problems and solutions that they have found."

Vladimir, PC

This behaviour can be explained through Muniz and O'guinn's (2001) discussion of brand community. The desire of an individual to seek out additional knowledge and information with regard to their respective platform via the community falls under the concept of legitimacy; the need to establish themselves as a legitimate member of the community through the acquisition of an expected level of knowledge. Aside from simply establishing their place as a valid member of the community, this knowledge seeking can also be purely pragmatic; the seeking out of answers to question they may have or staying 'in the know' regarding upcoming products and events.

Some participants noted that having access to increased knowledge of their platform enhanced their user experience. It allowed them to both have a better experience themselves, as well as share their increased knowledge with others in the same way it was shared with them, thus propagating the spread of information knowledge and the enhancing of others' user experiences. One participant reported that providing information to others even has a positive effect on their mood.

"I feel better about myself when I help others with problems they have or teach others something that they didn't know about the game, just like others teach me"

Frank, PC

The willingness of participants to go out of their own way to assist other platform community members in their use of the platform falls under Muniz and O'guinn's (2001) concept of 'moral responsibility' to the community. Moral responsibility is a duty to aiding other community members, one of whose key missions is assisting other community members in their use of the brand. This is what is occurring when participants provide help to their fellow members.

Secondly, Shared Experience pertains to participants sharing in their user experience with other users on their respective platforms, be it through discussion, cooperative gameplay, competitive gameplay, and so forth. As video gaming becomes increasingly social, with a large number of mainstream games being of a cooperative or competitive multiplayer nature, sharing in the user experience is becoming both more prevalent and important to users. Participants

reported a certain level of bond that forms when playing cooperatively with other users, serving to enhance the experience of users involved.

“In game, if it is some sort of cooperative communication and things work well (...) then it does feel real good when people show they are pleased with each other, a sort of small-scale comradery”

Vladimir, PC

“It makes games more enjoyable, (...) I find that if you are just playing with randoms in a squad of people (...) and you can talk to them during the game it’s a lot more fun. (...) you can actually work together when you are playing”

Trevor, Xbox

Even with games of a non-multiplayer nature, the ability to share, discuss, and critique the experience with other users was described as positive and beneficial.

“Sometimes it is (...) sharing an experience with that you had with your friends and family. Suddenly your mum and dad are playing games with you and haven’t been playing games for forever. It is kind of cool to hear these bonding stories.”

Carter, Nintendo

“I like improving in games and I like talking to other community members. I like seeing other people improve in general (...) because I like improving time, I like getting better at games and I watch other people a lot on Twitch.tv. (...) I am always drawn to watching PlayStation speed runs.”

Colin, PlayStation

Overall, participants expressed a desire to share both their own experiences as well as the experiences of others, whether those other users be known or unknown personally to the participant. This can be considered a manifestation of the interpersonal bond described by Muniz and O’guinn (2001) as being a cornerstone of brand community. Through shared use of a brand platform a bond develops between community members. Therefore, due to their bond, the sharing of participants’ personal user experiences with other community members, and the sharing in of others’ user experiences, is beneficial to their own user experience as it allows them to further develop and feel community bonds.

Thirdly, Socialisation pertains to the participants’ use of community interaction on their respective platform to satisfy their need for social interaction and connection. As many of the

participants spend a large portion of their time on their respective platform, for some it is the main point of contact they have with other human beings. As a result, several participants depend on interaction with other members of their respective platform's community in order to facilitate the development of social bonds.

"I think it is great because I feel a lot more connected with the world and with other people in a way. (...) the two main things are the social connection and freedom that the PC gives me."

Max, PC

"I can sit here at home all day and just talk to people and I feel like I have been really social."

Arthur, PC

For other participants who don't rely so heavily on their particular platform's community for social connection, socialisation takes on a role of amplifying the user experience – connecting the participants with other community members in a way that additional friendships can be born and close connections developed that may share in the user experience into the future.

"With World of Warcraft I had a raiding team and I was quite close knit with, I raided with the same general group of about 6 or 7 people of the course of 3 years and I became really close with them to a point where we were Facebook friends and if I ever went to the city that they lived in I would catch up with them and that sort of thing."

Noah, PC

"It gets you a bigger scope of people (...) you can have people all around the world and also you can chat with them (...) and all that kind of stuff. That kind of lifts the social network"

Sarah, PlayStation

Alternatively, the social bonds formed through shared experience can be fleeting, serving to provide a temporary level of companionship during the user experience but lost when it concludes.

"I met some people (...) and I was playing the Borderlands campaign all the way through (...) we went through most of Borderlands in two or three nights and I was just talking with random people. They didn't really become a part of my friends circle"

Harry, Xbox

Finally, video games on the platform can serve as the medium through which participants can interact with their already established friends and friend groups. This can be especially valuable if the participant's current situation means that they cannot interact with these friends in a face-to-face manner, due to geographical distance or other such circumstance.

"I get to spend more time with the people I actually like hanging out with, even if I don't have to be with them to do it"

Sarah, PlayStation

All forms of socialisation again fall under the umbrella of interpersonal community bonds as described by Muniz and O'guinn (2001). As reported by participants; bonds of friendship or comradeship, be they temporary or more permanent, are facilitated by the platform and can be quite easy to come by through general use of the platform without being deliberately sought out. This can be considered due to the interpersonal bonds that all brand community members will possess with each other by virtue of sharing in the same platform brand. The choice of using the same platform creates an initial bond between community members (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001), which can then be developed through shared experience and social interaction and serves to meet individuals' need for socialisation. In situations of brand tribes, the community bond is far greater even, and so tribe members may feel a familial bond with one another, further enhancing the meaning and benefit of social interaction with fellow members for those individuals (Taute & Sierra, 2014).

Ultimately, it is clear that participants derive several important benefits from engaging with their respective platforms' communities, those of informative, shared, and social natures. These facets of community interaction have the benefit of enhancing not only the participants' own experiences, but by extension the experiences of those they interact with.

4.3.3 Barriers to Community Membership

Whilst participants reported that, on the whole, participation and membership within their respective platforms' communities was without much in the way of obstacles, two main themes did emerge as being potential barriers to entry; Knowledge and Opinions, and Skills and Status.

For the most part, participants reported that their respective platform communities varied from fairly to very welcoming, possessing a high level of accessibility with regard to entering and maintaining community membership.

“Extremely easy to be a member of. (...) My brother who is a very introverted persona and does not have many friends at school (...) He is right at home when he hops on a public community server. He just starts talking to people non-stop and he feels like that is where he belongs”

Frank, PC

Some participants suggested that the nature of experience an individual will have interacting with a platform community depends largely on the individuals or demographics they end up interacting with.

“It depends. There are a lot of areas of the community in which some are like “Yeah, let’s accept everyone”, while some other people are just very to themselves and aggressive”

Sarah, PlayStation

“Yeah, (it’s) generally (positive) if you avoid all the 12 year olds.”

Harry, Xbox

These more negative elements of the respective platform communities appeared to be in the minority when it came to community interaction, with the general experience of participants being of a largely positive nature.

The first and most prevalently mentioned of the potential barriers to entry is that of the possession of particular Knowledge and Opinions. Many participants noted that it is either greatly advantageous or straight up compulsory to possess certain levels of knowledge, expertise, or opinions with regard to either a particular video game or the greater platform itself in order to be considered acceptable.

“If I didn’t have the knowledge of the game or how to use the controller or whatever then I would be a detriment, and they would get mad at me for not knowing what to do.”

Sarah, PlayStation

“In some respect yes; if you have an opinion that nobody agrees with then it can be pretty tricky because even if you have got a valid opinion, if the mass don’t agree with you then you are invalid. It is hard to be an outlier.”

Noah, PC

The second and less prevalently mentioned of the potential barriers to entry is that of the possession of certain Skills and Status. There were reports that for some video games,

particularly those of a strongly competitive nature, a certain level of skill was required for acceptance into the respective video game's community. Further, possession of a high skill level could mean the achievement of status within a respective community, leading to some celebrity reputation.

"In some communities, yes. I have definitely had a couple of years where it was very sort of 'the better you are at the game, the higher up the social ladder of the community you were (...) I think you are respected in the community a lot more, much faster.'"

Frank, PC

"Competitive, I'd say you definitely need a lot more; you have got more of a reputation when it is like a Major League Gaming kind of thing."

Arnold, PlayStation

Failure to possess the required skill level would result in toxic interaction with other community members, often in the form of negativity and name calling.

"It depends. If you suck then they are not very accepting, but if you are good then they are. (...) Basically, the better you are, the better you are going to be treated."

Arthur, PC

It was apparent however that both of these requirements, both for 'Knowledge and Opinions' and 'Skills and Status', were not reflective of what the greater platform community requires, but rather niche subsets of those respective communities. These smaller community segments came in the form of communities surrounding particular video games, or more enthusiast community elements surrounding the platform itself.

The presenting of barriers to community membership, in this case in the form of 'Knowledge and Opinions' and 'Skills and Status' requirements, is explained by the idea of community legitimacy, as is discussed by Muniz and O'guinn (2001). Community members, through the consciousness of kind (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001), define what attributes are desirable and what is expected of members of their respective communities. These determined requirements are then used in order to better differentiate between individuals that are to be considered part of the community versus those that are not. An advanced display of expertise and commitment to the platform brand, that possession of the right knowledge and skills implies, builds cultural capital for those members and further signifies them as 'true' members of the community (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998). In the context of platform and video game

communities, the exclusionary behaviour presents itself as toxicity, hostility, and general unpleasantness towards those individuals deemed 'not a part of the community'.

Finally, other participants noted the ease of community membership even when lacking in valuable or desirable knowledge, opinions, skills, or status, where an emphasis on simply being an eager and positive member of the respective community is valued over possession of certain favourable attributes.

"I think (the community would) probably (view you more positively if you possess certain desirable traits) but at the same time it is not that easy to make a fool of yourself. Often people are pretty accommodating, at least from what I have seen"

Vladimir, PC

"I have found that the community has been pretty accepting of me so far, as long as you have a good attitude toward it then you are pretty much fine, they will accept you in from what I have experienced."

Colin, PlayStation

Overall, it can be said that the respective platform communities and sub-communities are non-homogenous with regard to what they find to be desirable or necessary attributes for an acceptable community member, and that the level of tolerance and difficulty of membership in these respective communities will vary due to a range of factors, including but not limited to; the knowledge and opinions possessed by the prospective member, the skills and status possessed by the prospective member, and the demographic and attributes of the particular segment of the community in question.

4.3.4 Where Friends Play

It was found that for the vast majority of participants that the platform which they have come to claim as their main or only platform is also the platform upon which their friends are based. That is to say, the participants' core platform is their friends' core platform.

"All of (my friends) play games on computer; a couple will have consoles as well but primarily it's the computer"

Vladimir, PC

"Pretty much all of them. We have a few friends that play PlayStation 4, (...) but mainly PC, playing League of Legends or PUBG."

Arthur, PC

For some of the participants, a desire to be on the same platform as their friends was a driving factor in their decision to purchase that respective platform.

“That was a big motivation to want to play on the PlayStation 4. I never had a PlayStation 4 but most of my friends either played on PlayStation 3 or PlayStation 4 so PlayStation 4 was definitely what I wanted to be able to play with them.”

Colin, PlayStation

This tendency for participants to want to be on the same platform as their friends could be explained by Muniz and O’guinn’s (2001) concept of ‘consciousness of kind’. Friend groups already possess a ‘we-ness’ with each other (Bender, 1978), likely including a host of other shared interests and brand preferences outside of the platform they choose to game on. A group of individuals choosing to consolidate their friend groups on to a single platform for the purposes of playing together and sharing in the experience is likely a further effect of the consciousness of kind – the desire to maintain uniformity in preference and experience amongst the group, where the brand is a facilitator of these personal connections (Cova, 1997). Add on top of that the preference to play cooperatively or competitively and share in the platform experience with friends, and an individual’s desire to engage in the same platform as their friends makes sense.

“We would play at least once a week (...) We would sit there and play these smaller games, these 15 minute games, play a couple of rounds of that and then play the next game, (...) just shoot the shit for a couple of hours (...) which is a lot of fun.”

Frank, PC

4.3.5 Toxicity

Participants reported that the chief issue they faced with regard to interaction with other members of their respective platform community was that of toxic behaviour. Toxicity in the context of online community interaction can be described as hostility, bullying, sexism, immaturity, and other such negative behaviours. The prevalence of toxicity in online interaction was expressed by participants as being significant and a fairly common factor in community interaction. This has led some community members to avoid interaction with other members as to avoid any toxicity.

"People don't really want to interact with random players and that is understandable. (...) toxicity is a significant hindrance to the online experience. Just don't want to have to deal with toxicity which is why everyone goes into their little bubbles or private chats or stuff like that. (...) That is a significant problem."

James, PlayStation

This toxic behaviour was most commonly experienced within online video game interactions, and more specifically within highly competitive video games such as the incredibly popular League of Legends or Call of Duty, where player statistic such as their win/loss and kill/death ratios are highly valued.

"I played one game of League of Legends and I hated it because the people who play it are not friendly or particularly nice"

Wayne, PC

"I think it's a bit hard to avoid it. Especially in competitive games it is just impossible to avoid it and as I got better throughout the games I experienced more of it because it got more competitive as you go up the ranks. (...) The general toxicity is all over the place."

Frank, PC

It was suggested that this behaviour largely stems from a specific demographic of platform community member; that of young teens. This suggests that toxicity may in fact be a manifestation of immaturity.

"You can really tell their age. I know for a fact when I was playing on console the younger people were more vocal and more toxic, so I can only assume the same on PC"

Arthur, PC

Adding to the equation is the factor of anonymity with regard to online community interaction, another factor often cited by participants as being a driving force behind certain community members' willingness to behave in a toxic manner.

"They want to throw you off a bridge (if you play poorly) and that sort of thing. It can be pretty toxic in that respect, but I think you get that in pretty much every community that is anonymous."

Noah, PC

"It is like a double-edged sword if you will with the online thing, there is anonymity. 'We don't know each other so I'm going to be rude' or whatever. It's give and take, you can be whatever you want and some people choose to be an asshole."

Harry, Xbox

Toxic behaviour can be viewed as an aggressive rendition of the community-maintenance behaviours discussed by Muniz and O'guinn (2001); an attempt to uphold the community's standards of legitimacy, oppositional brand loyalty, rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility, as well as the consciousness of kind. The behaviour's extremity may even point to it falling under the umbrella of brand tribalism as described by D'Alessandro (2001) and Taute and Sierra (2014), wherein the personal significance the respective platform or particular video game has for individuals leads them to react much more strongly when they feel their place or experience with the platform/video game is being threatened by the presence or behaviour of other community members. In this sense toxicity could be seen as an effort to drive out those community members that threaten to compromise the members being toxic's place within the community out. For others it may simply be an anti-social or malevolent nature that leads them to interact negatively with other community members.

4.3.6 Online Community vs. Offline Community

Despite the obvious differences between an online and an offline community, participants largely reported that the two community types, online and offline, are very similar in the level of personal connection that they facilitate. It might at first glance seem intuitive that offline, face-to-face community interactions will inherently allow a much higher degree of personal connection than text or voice chat interaction via an internet medium, physically separated geographically, and so forth. Participants reported quite the opposite being the case, stating that whilst the personalness of an online interaction is of a different nature to that of an offline, face-to-face one, it is of an equally personal and significant nature.

"I would say they are probably equal, online and offline they are personal. Just in different ways. You are probably sharing the same amount depending on activity."

Arthur, PC

"I think they are about the same actually. (...) I know myself that I have made some very personal connections with people I know I will never meet in my entire life, unless I feel like shelling out \$3000 to fly to Germany."

Frank, PC

Participants stated various reasons for why they believed online community interaction to be equally personal to offline community interaction, citing factors such as the removed barriers of geographic distance and time in interaction, and the greater willingness of people in a more anonymous non-face-to-face interaction to better be their true selves.

"I would say you know someone better talking to them through Discord (a chat service) because they are not hiding anything. When you are in person people tend to hide emotions or what they want to say because they can't just leave the call, or they are face-to-face with someone. With voice chatting you can say whatever you want; you don't have any restrictions or anything. I think people are more open when voice chatting."

Arthur, PC

"I think some of the people online can actually be more real than in person. Everyone can have a good laugh and all that kind of stuff and seem pretty genuine online most of the time, so I think that is quite the same."

Sarah, PlayStation

This helps in understanding toxicity as discussed in Section 4.3.5, in that individuals can get away with behaving in a toxic manner when there is that physical distance and concealment of identity, whereas in a face-to-face interaction they would endanger themselves doing so.

Online community interaction's equality of personal interaction with offline community interaction is discussed by Muniz and O'guinn (2001) in their discussion of brand communities. In their 2001 paper, Muniz and O'guinn describe how brand communities transcend the geographical location significance that binds a traditional community together, and instead highlight the importance of interpersonal bond between brand community members. This is shown in the answers given by participants, who reported how the lack of restricting factors such as location or time, allowed for the growth of personal connections that could otherwise not be achieved in an offline setting, a statement further echoed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). Adding to that they enhanced interpersonal bonds between brand tribe members as described by D'Alessandro (2001) and Taute and Sierra (2014), as may well be the case in this context, and the level of personal connection experienced by platform community members when interacting online with one another becomes as personal, if not more so, than offline.

4.3.7 Influence of Community Interaction on Spending Behaviour

Community interaction was reported by participants to be a key factor in influencing their purchase behaviour and informing their purchase decisions. Linking with the community

interaction benefit of Information and Knowledge Sharing as discussed in Section 4.3.2, participants reported that the thoughts, knowledge, and opinions of other platform community members was important regarding the informing of their own purchase behaviour, as well as the formulation of their own thoughts and opinions.

“Mainly if we are looking at it, if you want to play something you can’t just be like ‘that looks interesting’. You need people’s input. Take Killer Instinct for example. It is a fighting game that I wouldn’t be playing if my friends didn’t recommend it”

Harry, Xbox

“When it comes to games I wouldn’t go ahead and buy a game that everyone says is crap, I would trust their opinion.”

Arnold, PlayStation

Some participants emphasised the importance of being able to access these community voices and opinion leaders, as they presented a lesser or un-biased source of critique and discussion than could be procured from a perhaps more traditional product reviewing entity or the producers themselves.

“Getting good reviews, suggestions from other people in the community is important (...) I generally would take the advice of someone else in the consensus community in terms of recommendations for games, over the average Kotaku or Destructoid or EndGadget or IGN or anything like that, because they are being paid to review games.”

James, PlayStation

The availability of trustworthy opinions on products, be it from friends in the community or complete strangers, often resulted in participants being willing to purchase products they would otherwise not consider, either due to great praise being attributed to a product or simply the desire to follow what the ‘herd’ is doing (i.e. buying a video game that has suddenly gained popularity or using a specific brand of product).

“It has definitely got me to buy games that I otherwise wouldn’t have bought.”

Trevor, Xbox

“I think where spending would be influenced would be where you have communities that you are a part of unanimously or in majority highly reviewing something. If many people you know are

using an item then I think you would be much more driven to buy it. I would be much more influenced by community opinion than by advertising.”

Vladimir, PC

“When it comes to Counter Strike, the community definitely made me feel like I wanted to spend money on the (weapon) skins because that was a part of the community, (...) I did end up buying those skins and that sort of thing.”

Wayne, PC

The willingness of participants to seek out the opinions of their fellow community members, the value and trust they place on other members' thoughts and opinions, and the behaviour of spending money on what the community says to spend money on, points to Muniz and O'guinn's (2001) concept of 'moral responsibility'. Moral responsibility amongst members of a brand community is described by Muniz and O'guinn (2001, p. 424) as being a “sense of duty to the community as a whole, and to individual members of the community”, for which its prime directives are to help integrate/retain members within the community and assist community members in their use of the brand. This behaviour is what is on display when community members provide critique and advice on various different platform-related products, in order to attempt to steer other community members towards products that will provide a positive experience or benefit, and away from those products that would provide a negative experience or detriment, thus assisting them in their experience with the product and aiding in retaining them within the respective brand community.

4.4 Brand Tribalism

4.4.1 Aspects of Platform 'Superiority'

With regard to what participants felt to be most important in making their respective chosen platform 'superior' to alternative platforms, three main factors became apparent; The Game Catalogue, Accessibility, and Tools and Hardware.

Firstly, and the most commonly referenced factor, is the Game Catalogue. The Game Catalogue refers to the number and/or variety of video games available for playing on the respective platform in question. This was commonly discussed by participants as the key factor in informing their opinion as to the superiority of their chosen platform, and ultimately their decision to utilise that platform over the alternatives present.

For some participants the variety of available video games was a key point. This is in reference to not only the sheer number of video games available on the respective platform, but also the variety in video game genres, themes, age ranges, and so forth, that may or may not be present on alternative platforms.

"I think it is a better way to play games because you have a bigger range, in my opinion. All the others don't have it, that I know of. (...) It is really diverse compared to the rest (...) We have got the variety for everyone; kids, teenagers, adults, women, men. Like whatever they are into, they can have it."

Sarah, PlayStation

"You can't beat PC with choice of games, and that's just talking legal games. (...) In general the game choice has always been in favour of PC and it's starting to move even more that way from what I've seen."

Vladimir, PC

"90-95% of the games that are on PlayStation or Xbox you can get on PC. One of the attracting factors is that you can even download for free, whereas you have to pay for it on PlayStation and Xbox."

Max, PC

For others, their preferred genres or types of video games could only be viably played on their respective platform, thus establishing that platform as superior in the eyes of those participants.

"That is mainly one of the reasons, the sort of games that I am into. They are the type of games that you have on your computer. Like massively multiplayer sort of games that you don't really have on console. That sort of thing is very specific to computer and that is why I enjoy it"

Noah, PC

"I think that I enjoy the wider array of competitive games on the computer. The interface using a console is limiting to the amount of competitive games that you can have. You can't have hugely popular computer competitive games like multiplayer online battle arenas and StarCraft on a console. You can't, there's no way to control it as well."

Frank, PC

Lastly, for some participants a certain game series in particular being present on their respective platform is a major driver of their loyalty to their respective chosen platform.

“Even now I go back and play the Master Chief Collection and I start playing Halo one. I just have a flash back of memories of me as a kid playing and spending hours and hours and hours. (...) So yeah, the Halo series being on Xbox is important.”

Harry, Xbox

Ultimately, the catalogue of games present on a respective platform emerged as a major theme in what informs participants’ belief in their chosen platform’s superiority over the alternatives. This is interesting in that the emphasis is placed not on the platform itself per se, but rather on what the platform has available to actually act as a platform for.

Secondly, the accessibility of the respective chosen platform was often reported by participants as being an important factor in its superiority over alternative platforms. Accessibility refers to ease of use, ease of access, portability, and so forth, and was second only to game catalogue in terms of frequency referenced with regard to factors of platform superiority.

The price of the platform, and its associated hardware and software, was the foremost factor of accessibility that was often raised by participants. Console-based participants espoused the lower upfront cost of entry over the PC platform, whereas participants based on PC espoused the lower cost of upkeep versus consoles. Upkeep, with regard to the platforms, pertains to the need of a user to upgrade or replace hardware with the passing of time. In a PC this is generally cheaper, as the individual parts that need replacing can be done so, whereas to upgrade or fix a hardware fault in a console platform such as the PlayStation or Xbox, often the entire product must be replaced.

“It’s got a nice barrier to entry as Xbox’s are, like, \$300 and that is pretty cheap. Add a chat headset and it is \$400 or whatever, so it is a nice entry for people who want to get into online gaming but don’t want to spend \$1000 on a PC.”

Harry, Xbox

“The PC is more cost effective because let’s say if my graphics card can’t handle future games, I can just buy a new graphics card and swap it out instead of getting a whole new PC, whereas you have to do that for a console.”

Max, PC

"That is the downside to consoles. With PC gaming you get a lot of pirating but that also brings in the benefit of games going really, really dirt cheap. Whereas if you go onto the PlayStation online store and you try to buy FIFA 2015 it's still, like, \$60."

Noah, PC

The ease through which the platform can be used, such as the setting up of the platform and actually interacting with it, was another important factor reported by participants.

"I think it is very easy to set up. My mum has wanted to play some games for a while and she had no trouble setting (an Xbox) up and she is normally terrible with technology."

Trevor, Xbox

Lastly, portability, or the ability to take the platform with you and utilise it on the move, was also reported by some participants to be an extra draw card.

"It's like 'Oh, I can play this in bed or on the go' (...) it is definitely nice as an option. I work from home so I don't really go out much but then I can just go into the bedroom and play. I was playing Skyrim in bed last night which is kind of cool, right?"

Carter, Nintendo

From participant responses it is apparent that the accessibility of a respective platform is a key factor in what makes it appealing in the eyes of an individual, and that is it another key factor in determining user beliefs in a platform's superiority.

Thirdly, and least common of the top three referenced themes with regard to the superiority of the respective platforms, is the tools and hardware available to the platform. 'Tools' references the peripherals available to a platform, such as headsets, controllers, and other such input and output devices. 'Hardware' references to the actual technology within the respective platforms, such as processing power, graphical power, and other such technological specifications.

The hardware power of a platform, particularly that of its graphical output, was commonly reported by participants to be of significance with regard to their belief in their respective platform's superiority.

"Back when I was playing Xbox it was like 30 frames per second versus PC games where I can get an easy 60 frames per second, so it is a lot smoother in terms of gameplay. (...) Generally (PC) looks better as well in terms of graphics."

Arthur, PC

"When you get a PC and you can play stably at 60 frames per second, you sort of sit there and say 'yes, this is the superior technology'. (...) when getting 60 frames per second in a fire fight you have to sit there and go 'there are some advantages at the very least'."

Wayne, PC

For other participants, the devices by which they have input with the platform were of key importance. The input devices believed superior by respective participants seemed purely to be a matter of preference, and included devices such as controllers and keyboard and mouse.

"Purely because of the keyboard and mouse aspect of it. I find keyboard and mouse a lot more intricate and easier to control than a controller. I find it a lot easier and in control (...) for that reason rather than just a controller with 10 or so buttons. (...) I just like the complicatedness of it I guess."

Noah, PC

"If you play offline adventure games, such as Uncharted for example, the controller feels more immersive, and the number one factor for me is that it feels better in your hand and the vibration feedback is more immersive."

Max, Xbox

Overall it can be said that whilst actual hardware power is a quantifiable variable with regard to measuring a respective platform's superiority, what tools an individual will prefer can be purely subjective and a factor of personal preference.

As per Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) and Taute and Sierra (2014), an individual's deep-seeded belief in the superiority of their respective chosen brand comes with the robust bonds formed between themselves and the brand. Because brand tribe members carry this 'notion of truth or rightness' towards their respective brand, they will therefore possess reasoning as to why they believe their brand to be the superior option. This is for both self-validation purposes, assuring themselves that they are on the 'right' side, and for pointing to in defence of the brand when facing opposition to their beliefs. In accordance with this conclusion, participants have produced the above discussed points as to why they believe their respective platform to be the superior choice, but as can be seen participants with otherwise conflicting platform choices have often pointed to the same reasoning as to why their platform is supreme (such as the game

catalogue or accessibility). This points to superiority residing largely in the preferences and beliefs of the brand tribe member, rather than an objective concrete measure.

4.4.2 Bonds to Brand and Community

As would be expected of participants believed to fall under the category of 'brand tribal', participants reported feeling an existence of bonds between both themselves and their respective chosen platform brand, and themselves and their fellow brand community/tribe members. The strength of these bonds varied from participant to participant, ranging from very strong to middling, but were present in the vast majority of participants interviewed.

Bonds between participant and brand were the more prevalent of the two bonds examined. Many participants described their bond to their respective chosen brand as being an important part of their life, and an integral part of their day-to-day activities on a similar level to eating or bathing. How this bond was established differed from participant to participant, but overall could be said to be the result of the sheer time and effort invested into the respective platform.

"Put it this way; I didn't miss anything more when I travelled. When I travelled overseas for about a year, I missed my computer more than anything else to be honest."

Noah, PC

"(I do feel a strong bond) because it is really comforting. What I do in my spare time is just play PlayStation; it is just easy and relaxing. It's probably because I would excessively play whenever I had free time as a child, so now it is just the thing I go to."

Sarah, PlayStation

Some participants described themselves as feeling protective of their respective brand, feeling the need to defend it from threats – both internal and external. This protectionism expanded beyond that of the specific piece of hardware that the participant personally owned, and onto the greater platform in general.

"I really do feel a strong bond to it. I get annoyed and angry when someone does something that hurts the computer ecosystem. (...) I do feel a strong connection with PC, not just mine but the platform in general."

Frank, PC

"I would say that I have a strong connection with PC. If someone on the other side of the street sat there and said 'PC's are shit' then I'd probably defend it."

Wayne, PC

From participant responses it was clear that they viewed their respective chosen platforms as a major part of their life in one way or another.

Bonds between participant and fellow respective platform community members was reported to be that of a somewhat lesser extent than that which exists between themselves and the brand, but it was nevertheless strongly present in most participants' cases. Participants reported feeling an innate level of kinship or comradery with fellow members of their respective platform community, despite in many instances not having any prior interaction with said fellow community members.

"I would be quite excited (to meet a fellow Xbox community member) especially because it seems like PlayStation has a much bigger market nowadays. I don't often meet people who play Xbox games (...) Definitely if I found out they had an Xbox I would be asking 'What games do you play' and 'How often do you play'. (...) It would make it easier to be friends with them for sure."

Trevor, Xbox

"So if I was asking somebody 'Do they play video games' and they reply 'Yes', and I said 'On PC' and they replied 'Yes', would I high five them? If that is the case then yes, I do that regularly."

Wayne, PC

Often this bond was said by participants to manifest in the willingness of community members to provide assistance to one another, with regard to both their use of the greater platform and within specific applications such as video games or other programs.

"Especially in as much as there is a lot of sharing of information and tips and tricks and software and the like. There is nice comradery when it comes to assisting each other with getting the most out of our platform."

Vladimir, PC

Overall, the bonds that participants reported having with both their respective platforms and platform community members are in line with what is to be expected of members of a brand tribe, according to Muniz and O'guinn (2001) and Taute and Sierra (2014). Muniz and O'guinn (2001) describe the relationship between the forms between and a brand community

member and their chosen brand, as well as between a brand community member and their fellow community members. Taute and Sierra (2014), however, describe the far stronger and more substantial form of those bonds that exist within the context of a brand tribe, which is what was perceived to be the case amongst the participants of this research. The degree to which participants reported feeling bonded to both their respective platforms and respective platform communities fits the description of what should be expected of a brand tribe (D'Alessandro, 2001; Taute & Sierra, 2014).

4.4.3 Opposition to Alternative Platforms

Despite what is to be expected of individuals within the context of brand tribalism, the majority of participants reported not feeling an opposition to members of what would be considered 'opposing' or competitor brand platform communities. Participants instead reported no strong feelings towards those members of competitor brands' communities, and expressed an understanding of why individuals would pick an alternative platform over their respective chosen platform.

"No, I don't blame them. It all comes down to what your friends play on. That's all it comes down to, I mean the main point of having a platform is to have something to play on. (...) If your friends are all playing on Xbox then you are more likely going to be playing on Xbox. I don't feel any animosity towards them."

James, PlayStation

"Not really, they have their own communities. People will not all have the same preferences, like people will scream out 'PC Master Race' but if you have no friends on PC then what is the point?"

Harry, Xbox

Some participants reported that what opposition does exist between the competing platforms is that of a playful, non-serious nature that the majority of community members are aware of and will partake in on occasion.

"I know to this day that when people say they are a console player I will call them a pleb, and I am saying it on purpose and there is no motive behind it. (...) It is a tongue and cheek sort of thing (...) I can't pass judgement"

Wayne, PC

A small minority of participants did voice possessing a degree of opposition towards members of opposition platform communities, but even then, articulated the knowledge that the opposition members which they are opposed to are minority segments of their respective communities themselves.

“Obviously you can’t generalise everyone. As you know there are people who are genuinely nice and don’t actually care, who play for fun. From my experience, at least from the people that I have met, it’s always serious PC gamers that rip into you.”

Arnold, PlayStation

This general lack of opposition to the members of alternative platform brand communities runs counter to what is described by Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) as being a hallmark of brand tribe membership. Due to the inherent belief in the superiority of one’s chosen brand, as traditionally associated with brand tribe members (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009), brand tribe members are expected to possess a greater level of antagonism to opposing brands and brand community members beyond that of what would be observed within a more general brand community. In this context however, the opposite was found to be true, and instead participants commonly reported possessing a low level of opposition towards alternative brand platforms and their community members, even if they’d in the past felt the expected level of opposition. This reduction in antagonism towards opposition brands may suggest a relaxing of brand tribal traits with individual maturity.

4.4.4 Loyalty Elasticity

A common theme reported by participants was that it would be very difficult to destroy their loyalty to their respective chosen platform brand and have them ‘change sides’ to an alternative platform. This was conveyed time and again by participants, who often stated their inability to even hypothesise a circumstance in which they would lose their loyalty for their respective platform.

“I think I will always keep coming back to computer, and I don’t think there is anything that could pull me away from it.”

Frank, PC

“Yeah, I am pretty content, and if it’s not broken why fix it? (...) There isn’t really anything that would push me away because I am quite a loyal PlayStation consumer.”

Arnold, PlayStation

"I am just a bit too addicted to PlayStation to even try to go off."

Sarah, PlayStation

In order for a platform brand to lose participants' loyalty, they explained that the deciding factor would have to be of an extreme nature; something that breaches the participants' moral or ethical standards, increases the cost of platform membership beyond which is tolerable, or the simple destruction of the platform as a whole.

"(They'd have to) probably burn puppies. That's a really good question. (...) they would have to work really, really hard to lose me as a PlayStation consumer."

James, PlayStation

"If as a whole something was morally wrong. If they were manufacturing graphics cards in Somalia and making children work to make them or something (...) Like there is not much else that would make me lose my support."

Arthur, PC

"I don't know, closing down Xbox? Honestly, I don't know. It would have to be pretty massive. Something I can't even think of."

Harry, Xbox

These responses communicate the concrete nature of the participants' loyalty towards their respective chosen platforms, and the difficulty one would have with attempting to remove them from that sphere. This is in line with what is to be expected of the members of brand tribes, where the bonds between individual and brand are of a very strong nature when compared to a more general brand community (Taute & Sierra, 2014). Further than that, the brand has transcended being just what the participants consume and has entered into their identities as individuals (Belk, 1988; D'Alessandro, 2001; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). In this way a participant losing loyalty to their respective chosen brand is in turn changing a part of themselves as individuals, altering not only their consumption behaviour but their very identities. For this reason, it makes sense that the participants will possess little in the way of loyalty elasticity, and short of a major change be very set in their position within their respective brand tribe.

4.4.5 Psychological Ownership and Identity

Much like as discussed in Section 4.4.2 regarding bond to brand, participants described a strong sense of ownership and bond with their respective platforms. Participants reported feeling a sense of psychological ownership over their respective chosen platforms beyond that of simple literal legal ownership of a product, and instead something of an ownership over the brand as a whole, with the platform being an integrated part of their identities as individuals (D'Alessandro, 2001; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009).

"I loved the PlayStation 2 and had one for a long time, and having a PlayStation 1 at Nana and Poppa's house as well I have grown up with it in my youthful years. It has been my childhood, so it is a part of me."

Colin, PlayStation

"I will be honest; I have thought about getting an Xbox tattoo. It is a terrible idea, I know, but the thought has come into my head multiple times where I was like 'I should just get the logo on my shoulder or something'. It's on a level where I am personally thinking of getting a mark on my body."

Harry, Xbox

This sense of psychological ownership was particularly present in participants whose preferred platform was the PC and that had assembled/built their PC themselves. This is consistent with what authors Pierce et al. (2003) discuss regarding how psychological ownership over a subject may be developed, particularly with regard to 'imparting the self into the target'. As Marx (1976) states, through exertion of effort individuals impose part of themselves into the things they create. In this context those participants who have built a PC have done just that, and thus further fostered the formation of psychological ownership.

"I think people who have computers, especially ones they built themselves, they have a connection to their computer just because you can have the same computer for 15 years and just upgrade the parts within it. It might be a completely different computer on the inside but it is still like the same computer on the outside. (...) Because I built it myself from the start I had a big connection to it. It was my own creation I guess, like a child. I am comparing my computer to a child but like a child it is your own creation, your own thing it is yours. I suppose it is the same with a computer, it is mine I couldn't imagine someone else having this computer. I couldn't sell it."

Noah, PC

"I feel a connection to my computer specifically; it is my wee baby that I built. (...) Definitely building your own, it does make you feel more invested in the platform."

Vladimir, PC

For some participants their respective platforms place within their identities was not as strong as it had been in the past, but was still a present entity. This was speculated by some to be a factor of their maturity, as though they had grown out of their platform being as large a part of their identity as it had previously been.

"I would say it was more of my identity when I was younger again and was a bit more of a fanboy, but now it is still there definitely, when playing or looking at new games that are coming out on Xbox that I am interested in. (...) I spent 15 hours plus a week playing Xbox, I think of myself as an Xbox player."

Trevor, Xbox

Participants reported a variety of reasons they believed they had come to possess the psychological ownership over their respective chosen platforms, and why said platforms had come to take a place within their individual identities. These reasons most commonly referenced the sheer time that participants had spent interacting with their respective platforms, but also other factors such as effort put into their platform and nostalgia were mentioned.

"I have grown up with it really, so my good memories are on it and a lot of my friends I have made playing it. I spent a lot of time playing it with friends. I would say it is part of who I am just due to the fact that I have just grown up with it really."

James, PlayStation

"I feel it is like someone who has a car hobby. They live and breathe cars, that is what they do. (...) I think it is the same with my computer and the PC platform which are a part of me like their car is to them. It's a huge part of my life and I have devoted so many hours of my life to it, and not just gaming but the platform itself, the operating system, the physical computer itself."

Frank, PC

"I think it is that nostalgia factor. (...) I had formed a relationship with I guess the idea of PlayStation and gaming that these specific games helped me escape my crap reality. That is why I still veer very, very strongly toward PlayStation and veer away from things I feel take away from that."

David, PlayStation

This conjecture by participants matches what the literature says with regard to how psychological ownership develops within individuals. The participants through their responses, to various degrees, demonstrated all three of the routes to building psychological ownership as espoused by Pierce et al. (2003), those being; *Controlling the target*, *coming to intimately know the target*, and *imparting the self into the target*. Participants controlled their platforms through interaction and manipulation, came to intimately know their platform over years of experience and interaction, and imparted themselves into their platforms through personalisation, achievement, and the forming of interpersonal connections with other users. This development of psychological ownership over their respective platforms and into their very identities connects with brand tribalism. As authors such as D'Alessandro (2001) and Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) discuss, a brand being a part of an individual's identity is a common factor found amongst brand tribe members. This further points to participants existing within that classification of brand tribal.

4.4.6 Nostalgia's Role

Many participants reported nostalgia being a present factor with regard to their respective chosen platform. Nostalgia is defined as 'sentimentality for the past, typically for a period, place, or thing with happy personal associations (Boym, 2008). With most participants having been playing their respective platforms and video games for the majority of their lives (see Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2), nostalgia has established itself as a prevalent force behind what platforms and video games they feel most strongly bonded towards.

"I am a very big fan of nostalgia. That is why I recently got all the other consoles again so I can play those games I played as a kid"

Colin, PlayStation

"There is a lot of nostalgia attached to it. Like I see my achievements as a manifestation almost of that time I spent playing games when I was 15 and didn't have a job and had too much time on my hands. I definitely have that kind of nostalgia towards my friendship with (those I played with) (...) A lot of the memories are attached to the people I played with."

Trevor, Xbox

"I used to play all the Crash Bandicoot games when I was little, and then recently PlayStation had that Crash Bandicoot Trilogy come out not long ago and I was like 'Hell yeah, this is great' and it made me feel way better about PlayStation that they brought it back."

Sarah, PlayStation

For some participants, their respective chosen brand carries strong meaning to them as a result of the circumstances in which they interacted and experienced it in the past.

"I think it is that nostalgia factor. I had a pretty rough childhood, and the PlayStation brought me a relief from the crap childhood that I had. I was able to associate what I thought was joy, what I thought was happiness, what I thought helped me feel better about myself, with PlayStation. I was able to form a relationship that I lacked with people."

David, PlayStation

Nostalgia's role in the bond participants possess with their respective platforms can be related back to the concept of psychological ownership. Scholars such as Seligman (1975) suggest that psychological ownership is a mental state learned in the early years of an individual's development. This is in line with the young ages of the respective participants in which their feelings of nostalgia developed towards their chosen platforms. Pierce et al. (2003) offer further explanation; stating that psychological ownership is developed through three main routes; *controlling the target*, *coming to intimately know the target*, and *imparting the self into the target*. Participants control the target through exerting their will over the platform in the form of ordering it to perform various functions (such as controlling characters in video games), come to know the target through hours and hours of use, and impart themselves onto the platform through personalisation and the recording of their achievements. With these factors in mind, the nostalgic personal bonds that some participants have formed and exhibit towards their respective chosen platforms are explained.

4.4.7 Participation in Platform Promotion

Nearly all participants reported participating in the promotion of their respective chosen platform in one way or another, either presently or in the past. The promoting of one's respective brand is described by Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) as a key facet of brand tribe membership, and a consequence of the inherent belief in the superiority of an individual's chosen brand. This belief in the superiority of their brand over that of the competition leads to behaviour such as voluntary participation in the promotion of the brand to other individuals, and the defence of the brand against outside attack. This behaviour was articulated by most participants as being largely in the past, but for some the behaviour was still present.

"Yeah, I would have, that is one nice way to put it. Another way would be to say that I got into online arguments way too much. I definitely recommended it to people and tried to persuade them over to my side of thinking"

Trevor, Xbox

"Not so much anymore, but back in the day it was very, very much what I wanted to talk about"

David, PlayStation

"Definitely, any time it comes up I will be there promoting it. Every time there is a friendly discussion on it I'll definitely be there promoting it non-stop."

Frank, PC

As the respective chosen brand can be considered a part of participants' identities as individuals (D'Alessandro, 2001; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009), as discussed in Section 4.4.5, in defending or promoting the brand they are in a way defending and promoting themselves. In this way participants' behaviour is therefore logical, and goes to further provide evidence of present or previous brand tribe membership. The simple desire to aid others in having a positive experience is an additional driver of promotional behaviour, as participants all believe their respective platforms to provide the best experience.

"It was the value of identity, if you want to go deep. It was part of who I was and so if you didn't love PlayStation as much as me then you don't accept me."

David, PlayStation

"I think it was justification to myself that I was right and I had spent my money well and was part of the best community. You want to feel part of the team, you want to feel superior, you want to feel smug."

Trevor, Xbox

"What got me more enthusiastic about it was I felt like people were being cheated out of their money by being sucked into consoles. I was like, I had to show them the light, and I had to save them. That sort of thing."

Vladimir, PC

Whilst participants commonly reported doing so in the past, they reported a reduced/non-existent present inclination to go out of their way to talk down opposition platforms, expressing more of an apathy towards oppositional platforms rather than an active antagonism. This is contrary to what Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) explain should be expected of brand tribe members, where opposition brands are the enemy and will be proactively denounced by members of the brand tribe. This may imply the softening of brand tribal traits with age, as has been suggested in Section 4.4.3.

"I don't openly bash (opposition platforms). I do have my opinion and if someone says 'Xbox is the best', like if one of my friends say that, then I will try to bring in my opinion but I wouldn't openly put it on forums or YouTube comments saying 'Xbox sucks' and that."

Max, PC

"I would if I was on the inferior medium, but I am not. I am on the best medium so I don't really care about them. Any argument that someone tries to make that a certain console is superior to a computer, I don't feel angry because I know it is not true."

Noah, PC

4.4.8 Brand Tribal in the Past

Whilst some key parts of what makes an individual brand tribal were reportedly retained by participants, such as the bonds they had with both their brand and community, and the psychological ownership they felt over the brand as a part of their identities, most participants reported possessing traits or self-images coherent with what a brand tribe member is expected to possess far more prevalently in their youth/in previous years, as opposed to in the present. This implies that, should those participants still fit the category of 'brand tribe member', a reduction in the strength of brand tribal traits has taken place over the course of time.

"It is definitely not like today but years ago it would be like I would look at someone that plays Xbox and look at them like an ignorant person that I didn't want in my life. Not to the extent of hating them, but it was stronger back in the day (...) it was something that was part of who I used to be. (...) It's not like that anymore."

David, PlayStation

"Sort of, in late high school especially. Like now I don't really know anyone who owns a console and doesn't play games on PC, but I used to know people and it was always a fun topic to debate when I was a more enthusiastic member of the PC camp. I feel there is less and less need to

be a PC patriot now, because it is becoming more and more ubiquitous anyway. I think it is also an age thing”

Vladimir, PC

This may help explain why participants reported lacking some key factors commonly associated with brand tribe members, such as strong opposition to alternative brands and a willingness to go out of their way to promote their brand whilst denouncing the opposition, as discussed in Sections 4.4.3 and 4.4.7.

Maturity was a commonly referenced factor when participants speculated as to why they have moved away from a more brand tribal self. Participants explained how the period of their lives, within which they would have most described themselves as having the characteristics consistent with being brand tribal, was their late single-digits to their mid-late teens. Often times they stated that they felt they have ‘grown out’ of being the fanboys/fangirls that they used to be in their younger years, and had matured past some of the obsession with their respective brands they once possessed.

“I would say when I was younger, and mainly because when you are younger you are more immature I guess. (...) because you own (your respective platform), if they attack that you are like ‘Oh, does that mean they are also attacking you?’. ‘You would have to be stupid to get a PlayStation’ and I have a PlayStation, so does that make me stupid? Like I said, mainly down to immaturity.”

Arnold, PlayStation

“I used to have a really big obsession. I didn’t really like (Xbox users) that much and I don’t know why, it was just a thing inside me that made me not like Xbox players. (...) That was probably from the age of like 12 to 15. I am no longer like that but I guess you could say I was one of those hardcore weird people that attack others that went against their brand, when I was younger.”

Sarah, PlayStation

This suggests evidence that whether or not an individual will transcend their respective brand’s community and enter into a brand tribe may be affected by an individual’s level of maturity, and more specifically brand tribe membership being more prevalent/likely amongst individuals who lack maturity.

Although it would almost certainly vary on a person-to-person basis, individuals lacking in a certain level of maturity’s predilection for being attracted to and members of brand tribes

may potentially be broadly explained by scholars such as Taute and Sierra (2014), D'Alessandro (2001), and Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009). Their discussion of brand tribe features such as strong bonds to the brand and the community, and how the brand enters tribe members' identities, respectively, may be what an individual in the life stage where they lack emotional maturity is particularly searching for. According to Wechsler (1950), maturity encompasses being aware of the correct time and place to behaving and knowing when to act, according to the circumstances and the culture of the society one resides in. An individual may seek out the bonds and belonging offered by brand communities, but due to immaturity lack the awareness of what is considered acceptable by society and fall deeper into brand tribalism. This is purely speculation, however, as there does not currently exist anything in the literature regarding maturity's link to brand tribalism, so no conclusion can be definitively drawn from this finding without further research.

4.5 Chapter Summary

The main aim of this research was to investigate members of video game platform brand tribes in order to discern a greater understanding of both brand tribe members in that specific context, as well as brand tribalism as a whole. In many ways, participants confirmed possessing traits consistent with what is to be expected of a brand tribe member, such as strong bond to brand and community, psychological ownership over the brand and its integration with their individual identity, limited elasticity of loyalty to the brand and so forth. This went some way in confirming that the right participants were being interviewed for the purposes of this research.

Throughout the course of the research, however, it became clear that participants did not espouse the entirety of what the academic literature says is to be expected of members of brand tribes. In fact, in many instances participants indicated that whilst they may once have fit the existing literature's description of a brand tribe member, they have since lessened and grown out of it to one degree or another. This has provided an as yet unexplored perspective on brand tribalism, with no investigation of brand tribalism's links to maturity having yet taken place. In order to better complete the existing academic understanding of brand tribalism, some targeted venture into this topic must be conducted.

Thus, by the end of this chapter sufficient evidence has been put forward from the data collected in order to expand upon and inform a greater understanding of both brand tribalism in the specific context of video game platform brands and the subject of brand tribalism as a whole, as well as produced an additional avenue through which future investigation may take

place. A full discussion of the above themes and further academic and practical implications are now presented in Chapter Five.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

Brand tribalism is a subject that has been well defined by authors such as Cova and Cova (2001), D'Alessandro (2001), Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009), and Taute and Sierra (2014), to name but a few. Little literature exists regarding the study of brand tribes within specific contexts, such as in this case video game platform brands, and what research could be said to have been done involving brand tribes in specific contexts was often done so without explicitly classifying them as such (Schouten & McAlexander (1995); Charmley et al., 2012). The intention of this thesis was to therefore further investigate brand tribes in the context of video game platform brands, as so to provide a better understanding not only of brand tribe members in this specific context, but brand tribes as a whole. The previous chapters have discussed the many aspects of this study, inclusive of a review of the literature, discussion of the methodology employed, and an overview of what findings were established from the data collected. This chapter aims to bring all these elements together, concluding in a discussion that incorporates the original research questions, new findings, and what academic and practical implications result from this research. First, themes from the interviews will be discussed, followed by a consideration of potential future research directions and limitations for the present investigation, and lastly a conclusion of the thesis.

5.2 Summary and Discussion of Findings

The research questions were generated in response to the study's objective, with the intention of exploring and developing an understanding of video game platform brand tribes. A variety of themes were later found to be apparent amongst brand tribe members. With regard to the first research question posed; 'Why is a video game platform brand tribe member part of a respective platform's brand tribe? Is membership based on individual traits?', nine key themes arose. The research indicated that brand tribe members frequently interact with other brand community members through numerous different mediums, both internal and external to the platform itself. This supports what has previously been said regarding the bonds and common interactions that exist between community and tribe members (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001; Taute & Sierra, 2014), as the willingness to interact with oftentimes strangers on the platform implies an inherent openness between community members. Barriers to being a part of video game brand communities were also described, which were found to differ from platform to platform, video

game to video game, in both what the barriers were as well as their intensity. This was a further manifestation of the consciousness of kind attempting to homogenise the respective communities as best possible (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001).

Further findings established the prevalence of toxicity within video game platform communities, and the nature of how it often manifests. This negative interaction appeared strongly tied to community self-regulation behaviours where individuals attempted to uphold standards established by the community (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). In some instances, the severity of this behaviour points to the influences of brand tribalism being present, as the increased involvement of individuals with their platform or video game leads them to take failure to maintain certain standards more personally (D'Alessandro, 2001; Taute & Sierra, 2014). Nearly all participants reported experiencing or producing toxicity at one point or another. Participants also discussed their various reasonings as to why they believed their respective platform to be the superior option when compared to alternative platforms. It was found that they would often claim the same factors as pointing to their respective platform's superiority, even across platforms (such as both PlayStation and Xbox having the superior game catalogue). This was found likely to relate to the inherent notion of truth or rightness regarding their brands that brand tribe members possess, and the facets participants had established as being superior were likely part of their internal need to self-validate their place on those platforms rather than any actual superiority of technical specifications or game catalogue (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009; Taute & Sierra, 2014).

The expected bonds between participant and brand, as well as participant and brand community, were present amongst the individuals examined, as was to be expected according to the literature (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001; Taute and Sierra, 2014). The degree of strength to which the two respective bonds were reported as being is indicative of brand tribe membership, much stronger than that which exists amongst members of a general brand community, and said bonds were commonly described as being felt and possessed. Contrary to what would be expected, however, is that a general lack of opposition towards members of opposition brand platforms was observed to be held by participants. The inherent belief in the superiority of one's brand has been identified in the literature as a driver of antagonism towards the members of alternative brands (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009), yet in this context it was found to often not be present in the individuals interviewed. Where antagonism was present, however, it was said to be towards an abrasive minority segment of opposition platform brand communities, rather than the whole. This antagonism from participants is perhaps simply a reaction to antagonism received, rather than a general underlying feeling of antagonism towards other platforms.

Psychological ownership, along with identity, were found to be key factors in deciding participants' statuses as being brand tribe members. How individuals described the gradual progression of their respective platform's personal significance to them is consistent with the concept of psychological ownership (Pierce et al., 2003), where through exerting control over the brand platform, coming to intimately know the brand platform, and imparting themselves into the brand platform, they came to develop a sense of ownership over their respective brands. Nostalgia plays into this, as most participants began gaming on their respective platforms at a young age, and psychological ownership is suggested to be a mental state that is first learned in the early years of an individual's development (Seligman, 1975), thus forming bonds to brand early and allowing for the greatest possible time for psychological ownership to grow. This development of psychological ownership over the brand establishes the platform as part of the individual's personal identity, and brand being a part of identity is a common trait to brand tribe members (D'Alessandro, 2001; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009).

Significantly, it was found that a link between an individual's level of maturity and their brand tribe membership may exist. A common theme that emerged from the interviews was that whilst individuals may possess certain brand tribe specific traits in the present, those traits plus others they no longer possess were far more prevalent in them when they were younger. It was suggested in multiple instances that individuals matured out of many of the traits generally said in the literature to be possessed by brand tribe members, becoming less zealous regarding their respective chosen brand platform as they grew up. Whilst the existing literature can broadly attempt to explain such a connection (Wechsler, 1950; D'Alessandro, 2001; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009; Taute and Sierra, 2014), nothing can be said definitively about this phenomenon as there is yet to be any targeted investigation conducted into such a link, and this study was not knowledgeable of nor prepared to explore such a link. Therefore, the researcher can only speculate as to the link's actual existence, and what reasoning may lie behind it.

With regard to the second research question; 'What general/social utility does a video game platform brand tribe hold for its members?', three key themes emerged. Several main benefits were said to be derived from engaging in community interaction, namely; Information and Knowledge Sharing, Shared Experience and Competition, and Socialisation. These benefits, and the behaviours that accompany them, have been explained extensively in the literature pertaining to brand community, where community obligations felt by brand community members lead to the behaviour and thus benefits described by participants (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). Moreover, individuals preferred to belong to the same respective platform that their friends group does. This is likely a further result of the bonds to community felt by brand community members (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001), as well as the three main benefits to community

engagement previously discussed. Finally, individuals described an equality between online and offline community interaction in just how personal and significant they felt the interaction as being. The removal of restricting factors such as space and time has allowed for the forming of brand community bonds that could otherwise not be achieved (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Adding to this the enhanced nature of bonds that exist within a brand tribe (D'Alessandro, 2001; Taute & Sierra, 2014), and the level to which individuals felt a personal connection to those they interacted with online became often more substantial than in offline interaction.

For the last research question; 'Does video game platform brand tribe membership affect a member's consumption behaviour? If so, how?', again three main themes were apparent. Individuals made clear their preference for seeking out the opinions and recommendations of their fellow community members when it comes to informing their purchase decisions, as opposed to official channels such as professional review entities or the platform itself's marketing efforts. This was found to be due to the innate level of trust that individuals place in their fellow brand community/tribe members to provide accurate guidance in enhancing their experience with the brand, largely derived from the concept of moral responsibility to the brand community (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). Participants were also found to possess a very low degree of loyalty elasticity with regard to their respective brand platforms, oftentimes stating that they could not conceive of a realistic scenario within which they'd feel obligated to switch to an alternative platform. This is due to both the strong bonds that exist between brand tribe member and brand (Taute & Sierra, 2014), as well as the brand's position within their personal identities as individuals (Belk, 1988; D'Alessandro, 2001; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009), where giving up the brand would be equivalent to giving up a part of themselves. Lastly, whilst individuals reported still willingly engaging in the promoting of their respective brand platforms, it was with far less prevalence than in their past. Furthermore, little-to-no inclination to talk-down oppositional platforms was found to be present amongst those individuals examined. This runs largely contrary to what the literature suggests should be expected in the case of brand tribe members (D'Alessandro, 2001; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009).

This discussion of themes has provided an overview of the findings of the research, and linked them back to the research questions first posed at the beginning of this investigation. In the following section, the academic and practical implications of these findings will now be discussed.

5.3 Implications of Research

5.3.1 Academic Implications

This thesis was conducted with the intent of filling an existing gap in the academic literature encompassing brand tribes, and specifically brand tribes surrounding video game platform brands. Whilst there has been a fair deal of research into general brand tribalism in the past (Cova & Cova, 2001; D'Alessandro, 2001; Cova & Pace, 2006; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009; Taute & Sierra, 2014; Finsterwalder et al., 2014), and some unwitting exploration of brand tribes in specific contexts (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Charmley et al., 2012), no investigation has been conducted in the way of studying brand tribes in the context of video game brand platforms. Considering the immense growth of the video game market over recent years (ESA, 2016), the absence of research into this area stands out as demanding examination. Therefore, the benefit of this research is twofold; to fill the gap that is the lack of literature regarding video game platform brand tribes, and to intentionally provide an investigation into a brand tribe in a specific context. The findings of this thesis have accomplished this goal, and contributed to the existing literature regarding brand tribalism.

At a general level, this study of video game platform brand tribe members has contributed support for previous brand tribe findings by way of providing similar evidence to what has been previously observed by scholars but within a new context. Support for statements regarding brand tribe members' bonds to brand and brand community (Taute & Sierra, 2014), the brand being a part of tribe members' identities (D'Alessandro, 2001; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009), concrete degree of brand loyalty (D'Alessandro, 2001), and participation in platform promotion (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009), and for the most part video game platform brand tribe members were found to fit the description of brand tribe members as painted by previous scholars. Some factors, however, such as active antagonism to oppositional platform brands and their respective community members (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009), were found not to be present amongst video game platform brand tribe members. This perhaps suggests that what traits a brand tribe will possess is non-homogenous across contexts, and that the traits a brand tribe exhibits could potentially vary greatly context-to-context.

Moreover, the major implication of this research is the discovery of a potential relationship between the factors of maturity and brand tribe membership. More specifically, the findings suggest that an individual who lacks maturity is more likely to belong to a particular brand tribe, and exhibit the traits associated with brand tribe members. Additionally, the findings also suggested that as an individual with brand tribe membership's maturity increased with their age, the brand tribal traits they possessed softened in intensity, while others were

lost entirely. This is all merely stated under the assumption that an individual's maturity increases with their age, and therefore that a young individual will lack maturity, which does not adequately address the complexity of maturity as for many individuals within both cases this would not be true. Moreover, although a connection between these two elements seemed apparent from the findings, this research was not specifically directed at exploring such a link, and thus was unequipped to examine this concept properly aside from to simply ascertain its existence. Hence, whilst this topic requires further nuanced research, an important development as to the understanding of brand tribes that has otherwise not yet been explored has been successfully produced by this research.

5.3.2 Practical Implications

Along with the implications this research holds for academia, several practical implications can be observed from the findings. Most significantly is how practicing marketers can work to increase the share of brand tribal members of the communities surrounding their respective brands. Scholars such as Goulding et al. (2013) and Taute and Sierra (2014) espouse the huge utility for marketing that brand tribes represent, and how in order to make use of this utility brands must actively attempt to attract membership to their respective brand's tribes. It was found that an individual's brand tribe membership is at least in part a result of the strong psychological ownership they have developed over their brand. The way it most commonly occurred was simply through time spent with the platform, especially from a young age. This is consistent with the concept of 'Customer Lifetime Value', as espoused by authors Zeithaml, Lemon, and Rust (2001). Therefore, practitioners should be aware that in order to maximise the chance of their brand becoming a consumer's chosen brand for life and that individual entering into a brand tribe, they have to get their brand in their consumers' lives at an early age and preferably before alternative platforms do. This implication is applicable to both video game platform brand tribes specifically, as well as brand tribes in general.

Additionally, it was found that once individuals had entered into their respective video game brand platform's respective brand tribe, their loyalty became very inelastic. This manifested chiefly in an unwillingness of brand tribe members to switch from their chosen platform to an alternative, and oftentimes an inability to even imagine a circumstance in which they would feel compelled to do so. For practitioners operating within the realm of video game brand platforms, this means that there is likely a great deal of leeway with regard to attempting to innovate or try things that they would not otherwise risk trying with the brand. This sort of change may still be unappealing to the average brand community member and thus a risk, however, so for that reason it would be important to first maximise the number of members in

the respective brand tribe through the method discussed above in order to minimise risk and negative reaction. A platform in possession of a large brand tribe will find themselves far freer to innovate and market creatively with minimised risk.

Lastly, individuals were found to place large value on the thoughts and opinions of other community members regarding products affiliated with the respective platform, such as video games, hardware and accessories, and so forth. More faith is placed in the words of individuals with no affiliation with the brand, be they friends or strangers, than that of such 'official' voices such as professional reviewers or the brand itself. Individuals were found to often consult the community before making a purchase decision, with the response they receive then determining whether a purchase is then made or not. For this reason, it is perhaps more pragmatic to move towards partnering marketing efforts with community voices, opinion leaders from within the actual communities being targeted, and away from traditional review media outlets such as professional magazines and websites. Such opinion leaders' endorsements would carry far more sway with the average community member – as long as the leader is seen to be speaking in the interests of the community and not a particular business entity.

5.4 Limitations

In any piece of research there will oftentimes be limitations encountered in the process that may or may not influence the outcome. Guest et al. (2006) state that a sample size of 14 is an appropriate amount in order to achieve saturation of data, and the researcher does believe that saturation was indeed achieved and that useful data was yielded with regard to video game platform brand tribes. What remains difficult to declare, however, is whether the findings of this study are generalisable to other brand tribe contexts, such as brand tribes surrounding other products for example, or whether they are specific to the video game platform context. Short of conducting further research with alternative research designs, the applicability of this study's findings to the subject of brand tribes as a whole remains uncertain.

Market research organisation ESA (2016) found that 40% of video game consumers/players are female, a stark difference from the idea of young boys and men that is traditionally associated with video gamers. Despite this near even split in the gender demographics, only one female video game platform brand tribe member participated in the research. This of course restricts just how widely and deeply a female gamer's experience can

be explored within this particular piece of research, and thus in order to properly further explore themes specific to female gamers additional targeted research must to be conducted.

Another limitation would be a likely general unwillingness amongst those who may actually belong to video game platform brand tribes to admit to either themselves or others as being such. Because brand tribalism carries with it some negative connotations of fanaticism and anti-social behaviour, especially within video gaming where the term 'fanboy' is used negatively to describe brand tribalists (Locke, 2012), some individuals who fit the description of a brand tribe member will undoubtedly be less inclined to reveal themselves as such. This will limit the total number of potential participants for the research, as the taboo of being brand tribal keeps brand tribal individuals quiet.

Perhaps the greatest limitation, however, is the inability for individuals under the age of 18 to participate in this research due to ethical considerations. As the research found through the course of the interviews, maturity was often linked by participants to their experience with brand tribe membership. Participants reported being a much higher level of brand tribal in their late single-digits to mid-teens, and having their traits associated with brand tribalism relaxed or lost as they 'grew out' of it, although the reality of this still remains to be examined. If brand tribalism, at least in the context of video game platforms, is truly influenced by the maturity of individuals, then not being able to investigate individuals of that previously mentioned age bracket will restrict a comprehensive understanding of brand tribes from being developed.

Finally, ensuring data quality can be of great difficulty when conducting semi-structured interviews (Hopf, 2004). Although best effort can be made by the researcher in order to maintain a bias-free interpretation of the data collected, subconscious bias will always be a present factor due to the subjective nature of qualitative methods. This is especially true in the context of this research, as the researcher has had extensive prior experience with video gaming culture themselves, and thus carried with them their own pre-established thoughts, biases, and opinions with regard to topics such as video game brand tribes and so forth. Therefore, whilst every attempt has been made to minimise bias in data assessment, the only way to properly ensure that there has been no researcher influence would be to benchmark the themes by using a second researcher to assist in analysing the interview data. In future research this method could be used to increase credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability of the data collected.

5.5 Future Research Directions

A goal of this research was to contribute to the existing literature regarding brand tribes, and further to provide an examination of a brand tribe in the specific context of video game platforms. In accordance with these intentions, some directions for future research are discussed below. This research was about examining brand tribe members as they are defined by authors such as Cova and Cova (2001), D'Alessandro (2001), Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009), and Taute and Sierra (2014). As such this study was unprepared for those individuals being examined possessing a different set of brand tribe traits compared to what the literature states to expect, and especially wasn't structured in a way to properly explore the idea of age being linked to brand tribalism. Conduction of a study specifically for exploring this newfound potential connection of maturity and brand tribalism is therefore an obvious direction of future research.

Another avenue of research that may be worth pursuing would be the role of gender with video game brand community. As the female participant involved in this research described, females are treated differently within the video game community simply for their difference in gender. A qualitative study to explore how differently they are treated, and for what reasons that is, may provide valuable insight into understanding video game brand communities further. This research was conducted in New Zealand, and thus the data collected is representative of New Zealand opinions and attitudes towards the topics of brand tribalism and so forth. The same study conducted in other parts of the world, such as the United States of America or Japan, may very well yield different outcomes by virtue of differences in culture, as different cultures likely place different values on brand and brand loyalty. Therefore, repeating this study elsewhere in the world may be a good future research direction.

Now that the presence of brand tribes within video game platform brand communities has been confirmed by this research, conduction of a quantitative study could be used to further develop an understanding of video game platform brand tribe members. A quantitative approach could be beneficial as it would allow researchers to explore the extent to which brand tribe members compose the respective general platform brand communities, as existing literature would suggest that tribe membership numbers may be quite high based solely on the prevalence of their voice within the respective communities (Locke, 2012; Orland, 2016). Knowing the actual size of brand tribes within respective markets would be useful for both academics and practitioners, as they could then better understand and interact with them accordingly.

5.6 Conclusion

The goal of this research was to develop the understanding of both video game platform brand tribes, and brand tribes as a whole. Specifically, the traits of video game platform brand tribe members, the utility that brand tribe membership holds for them, and what effects brand tribe membership has on their behaviour as individuals, were questions investigated by the researcher. From the findings a host of major themes emerged, many of which supported what previous research into brand tribes and their members had concluded, whilst others ran contrary. The new finding of a link between an individual's maturity and brand tribe membership was established as potentially existing, although this area requires additional targeted investigation. Regardless, an understanding of video game platform brand tribes and their members was achieved, and thus a gap in the existing brand tribe literature has been at least partially filled.

Ultimately, this study successfully fulfilled its intended purpose and has developed the academic understanding of brand tribes both generally and in the specific context video game platform brands, as well as delineated areas for future investigation to further develop the field of brand tribalism more holistically. Through the use of thematic analysis, the exploratory nature of the research process was able to best highlight the predominant themes garnered from the semi-structured interviews. This new data contributes to a realm of consumer behaviour not yet greatly explored or understood, and it is hoped that this study will serve as a foundation for future research. It is clear that brand tribes are a reality amongst brand communities, and that their influence in the market may be significant. Therefore, with the future generation of even greater understanding, the knowledge regarding brand tribes may be utilised for both academic and practical endeavours.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: *Information Sheet for Interview Participants*



Department of Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurship
 Telephone: +64 27 363 0577
 Email: cameron.bishop@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
 24th November 2017

Brand tribalism and the gamer: How extreme brand enthusiasts in video game console brand communities transcend basic consumption

Information Sheet for the Participant

My name is Cameron Bishop and I am a Master of Commerce student at the University of Canterbury. I am the primary researcher for this study of which the data will be used in the completion of my thesis. The purpose of this research is to understand why some video game console users are especially enthusiastic about their chosen brand (i.e. PlayStation, Xbox, Nintendo), and how they interact with other console users.

If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement in this project will consist of participating in an interview with the researcher. The interview is expected to take 45 minutes to 1 hour of time, dependent on how the interview goes. Audio data will be recorded via the researcher's secure password-protected phone, transcribed via a third-party service, and will then be analysed by the researcher.

Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage up until the 15th of May 2018 without penalty. You may ask for your raw data to be returned to you or destroyed at any point up until the 15th of May 2018. If you withdraw before this date I will remove any information relating to you. After this date it will be too difficult for the researcher to realistically remove your data from the analysis.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete anonymity of data gathered in this investigation: your identity will not be made public. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, your transcribed data will be assigned a pseudonym for identification during analysis and in the research paper, and your real identity will never be used following the initial interview and transcription. Your real identity will only be available to the researcher, research supervisor, and to the transcriber who will sign an agreement of confidentiality to ensure absolute anonymity. The raw data will be securely stored on the researcher's password-protected devices, and will be destroyed upon after a period of five years. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UCLibrary.

Please indicate to the researcher on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of results of the project.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for a Master of Commerce by Cameron Bishop under the supervision of Professor Paul Ballantine, who can be contacted at paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz. He will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in the study, you are asked to reply to the consent form with an email to cameron.bishop@pg.canterbury.ac.nz expressing your consent and including a typed signature. You will also be asked for verbal consent at the beginning of your interview.

Appendix 2: Consent Form for Interview Participants



Department of Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurship
 Telephone: +64 27 363 0577
 Email: cameron.bishop@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Brand tribalism and the gamer: How extreme brand enthusiasts in video game console brand communities transcend basic consumption

Consent Form for the Participant

- ☐ I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in the research.
- ☐ I understand that participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time up until the 15th of May 2018 without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided should this remain practically achievable.
- ☐ I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher, research supervisors, and transcriber, and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- ☐ I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after five (5) years.
- ☐ I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- ☐ I understand that I can contact the researcher Cameron Bishop (cameron.bishop@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or supervisor Professor Paul Ballantine (paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz) for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- ☐ I would like a summary of the results of the project.
- ☐ By replying to this consent form with an email to cameron.bishop@pg.canterbury.ac.nz with an expression of consent and a typed signature, as well as verbally consenting at the start of the interview, I agree to participate in this research project.

Appendix 3: Interview Run Sheet

Interview Run Sheet

Ice breaker: How did you first get into video gaming? How long have you done so?

Brand

- What platform do you currently game on?
- How long have you used your chosen brand of video game platform?
- Is your current preferred brand the only brand of game platform you have owned? If not, why did you switch/make current your main? Where your friends play?

Community

- What are your perceptions of what a community is?
- Is the (chosen brand) community the main/only community you are a part of?
- How often do you interact with members of the (chosen brand) community? How about members from (opposing brands)? How do you interact with them (i.e. what mediums – Reddit etc.)? What do you prefer/best? What do you get out of that?
- Do you feel your online community is easy to be a member of? Barriers, knowledge/skills/tools? Past experiences? Positive, negative? Toxic members?
- How do you feel the online general community compares to an offline community? Easier/better, or harder/worse? Less personal/a disconnect online?

Brand Tribe

- Why do you believe that your (chosen brand) is the best out of all the alternatives? Most important part for you? Marketing efforts/interaction? Core function of platform? Games? Nostalgia? Familiarity? Accessibility? Customisability? Achievement?
- Do you feel a strong bond towards (chosen brand)? If so, how did this bond form?
- Do you feel a strong bond towards other members of your online community? Why?
- Do you feel an opposition towards the general users of opposing platform brands, as if they are your enemy in some way? Have you ever? If so, why?
- Do you participate in promoting (chosen brand)? Talking-down competition brands? If so, why?
- How do you feel participating in (chosen brand)'s online community benefits you (i.e. what do you get out of it)?
- Do you feel as though (chosen brand) is in some way yours or a part of you? If so, why?
- Why do you believe (chosen brand) means so much to you?
- How do you think being a part of the online (chosen brand) community has affected your spending of money on (chosen brand)? On other things? Why is that?
- What would (chosen brand) have to do to lose your support for them (marketing-wise)? How can they increase it (marketing-wise)?

Anything else you'd like to add that you think is important that we haven't touched on?

Appendix 4: *Transcription Confidentiality Form*



TRANSCRIPTION CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Thank you for your participation in the research project **Brand tribalism and the gamer: How extreme brand enthusiasts in video game platform brand communities transcend basic consumption**. Protecting the confidentiality of the research participants is essential and you are therefore asked to sign the following confidentiality agreement.

I, _____, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all verbal information and audio recordings received from the research team for the above project. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual and the content of any discussion that may be revealed during transcription.
2. To not make copies of any audio files or computerised files of the transcribed focus groups, unless specifically approved to do so by the researcher Cameron Bishop.
3. To store all audio files and materials in a password protected computer or safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. To return all materials to researcher Cameron Bishop in a complete and timely manner at the completion of transcription.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents or audio files from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices on completion of transcription.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audio files and/or files to which I will have access.

Name (printed) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix 5: Human Ethics Committee Approval Letter



HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson
Telephone: +64 03 369 4588, Extn 94588
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: HEC 2017/113/LR

11 December 2017

Cameron Scotland Vivian Bishop
Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurship
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Cameron

Thank you for submitting your low risk application to the Human Ethics Committee for the research proposal titled "Brand Tribalism and the Gamer: How Extreme Brand Enthusiasts in Video Game Console Brand Communities Transcend Basic Consumption".

I am pleased to advise that this application has been reviewed and approved.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 5th December 2017.

With best wishes for your project.

Yours sincerely

R. Robinson
pp.

Professor Jane Maidment
Chair, Human Ethics Committee